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SONGS OF SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

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SONGS OF SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

A STUDY IN ISAIAH XL—LV

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TO

THE REV. D. M. GORDON, LL.D. C.M.G.,

IN RECOGNITION OF KINDLY FELLOWSHIP AND HELPFUL
ENCOURAGEMENT DURING THE FIFTEEN YEARS OF
HIS PRINCIPALSHIP OF QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY,
THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED BY THE
AUTHOR

Preface

THE twelve expositions contained in this small volume appeared in *The Presbyterian Witness*, Toronto; many expressions of appreciation were received which suggested that they might render service in a more permanent form. Since then they have been revised and partly re-written. The principles of faith and service that they reveal belong now to the essential elements of the Christian faith which continually demand a larger application to our personal and social life. This kind of treatment naturally involves a certain amount of repetition, as the poet presents the same great truths from varied points of view and places them in different lights. He has made a lasting contribution to religious thought and life which should be appreciated by a larger circle than those who are called students in the narrower sense.

A brief introduction has been provided for those who desire to learn the view that is held by scholars as to the relationship of the particular passages to the historical situation out of which they arose, and their place in the book of which they now form a part.

Preface

I desire to express my thanks to Rev. R. J. Wilson, of Toronto, for his interest in the publication of these expositions, to Rev. William Barker, Manchester, who read the proofs and compiled the index, and also to the publishers for their patience and courtesy in making the necessary arrangements.

W. G. JORDAN.

Kingston,
Ontario.

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I

Introduction

Introduction

I. THE BOOK OF ISAIAH (i.-lxvi.). The largest volume of prophetic literature that we now possess bears the name of Isaiah, whose ministry in Jerusalem lasted about forty years, 740 to 700 B.C. He is one of the greatest of those Hebrew prophets who have left behind them specimens of their spoken sermons ; hence there is a certain justification in calling by his name a book which contains contributions from many unknown writers, who may be regarded as his disciples and successors. Upon this book scholars have spent much patient, reverent study, especially during the last one hundred and fifty years.

The result is that certain broad lines of division have been reached which have gained fairly general acceptance.¹ This still leaves room for discussion as to the date and significance of particular passages, e.g., The Messianic prophecies in chapters ix. and xi. and the poems which are called in the supreme sense, "The Songs of the Servant of Jehovah." What we have, then, in the present book (i.-lxvi.) is a library of prophetic literature, representing various types of

¹ The bibliography of this subject is now very extensive, but in connection with the modest treatment here attempted it may be sufficient to mention two recent books : *The Faith of Isaiah*, by A. R. Gordon, and *Isaiah in Modern Speech*, by J. E. McFadyen (James Clarke & Co., Ltd., London).

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preaching, beginning with the genuine oracles of Isaiah and including the contributions of men who, in their own way, ministered to later generations.

II. THE VARIED CONTENTS OF THE Book (i.-lxvi.). Chapter i. has a superscription and is a combination of separate oracles mainly from Isaiah. The second chapter has a superscription of its own which is followed by a poem (verses 2-4), found also in Micah iv. 1-4. If we regard chapters ii.-xii. as one section, we note that it closes with a short poem in the style of the later psalms. This section probably once stood as a separate book and in it much of Isaiah's most vigorous preaching is preserved ; there are, however, even here passages of later date (ii. 2-4 ; iv. 2-6), and some of doubtful origin.

Chapters xiii.-xxiii., with the exception of part of xxiii., contain a series of " burdens " or oracles against foreign nations. The arrogance of surrounding tribes is denounced and the irresistible might of Jehovah's justice, which brings to nought the schemes of cruel tyrants, is magnified. This part may have been at one time a separate book ; it contains a number of Isaiah's utterances.

Passing to xxiv.-xxvii. we have a book different in its subject and style ; the outlook is not towards Israel or a particular foreign nation, it embraces the larger world. " Behold, Jehovah maketh the *earth* empty, and maketh it waste and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof." " The *earth* shall be

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utterly emptied and utterly spoiled, for Jehovah hath spoken this word." Interwoven with the different parts of this strange vision are separate poems which repay careful study (cf. xxv. 6-8).

The remainder of the first half of the book has a marked variety in style and tone: (a) chapters xxviii.-xxxiii. contain, with some later additions, some of Isaiah's most powerful poems, note the fierce attack on the Samaritans. "Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty" (xxviii. 1). (b) xxxiv. and xxxv. are two chapters probably of a much later time; one predicts terrible vengeance on Edom, the other pictures in poetic phrase the redemption of the Exiles. (c) Chapters xxxvi.-xxxix. are largely historical and biographical and are found in II. Kings, xviii. and xix., in what is probably their original form.

The poems which form the Book of Consolation" (xl.-lv.), are generally regarded as coming from one author.¹ On the first discovery of different authorship, what was then regarded as the second part of the book (xl.-lxvi.) was named "Second Isaiah," and recognised as belonging to the Exile (about 540 B.C.). This view was worked out clearly over a hundred years ago, but has slowly gained general acceptance in the intervening period. Now such names as "Second" and "Third" Isaiah are misleading, except as they mark particular stages in the study of the book. The great prophecy beginning, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" (xl.-lv.) is now placed

¹ But see what is said below on "The Servant Question."

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in the Exile about 540 B.C. The remaining chapters (lvi.-lxvi.) are lacking in real unity; most of the pieces suggesting the condition of affairs after the Exile (about 450 B.C.). This rapid survey shows that many nameless saints and poets have contributed their share to this great treasury of prophetic literature. Those who are familiar with the Old Testament books know that this is true of most of the histories and poems, and to a large extent of the prophetic oracles.

III. THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PREACHING.

(1) "Isaiah of Jerusalem," though we have only scanty records of his long career, stands out clearly before us as a faithful preacher and patriotic statesman. The God of Israel appears in glorious majesty as the centre of his thought, the inspiration of his service; hence the prophet demands humility, purity and righteousness as the real signs of loyalty to the Divine King (chap. vi.). He is an active citizen, engaged in constant warfare against dense stupidity and coarse materialism. The beautiful poem, "The Song of the Vineyard" (chap. v. 1-7) presents in poetic form one of his noblest sermons. It is possible that Isaiah, then a young man, came forward at one of the great festivals and recited, in the manner of an Oriental story-teller, a song which turned into a sermon; it begins in light lyrical style, changes quickly to a solemn exhortation and closes with sharp, stinging blows. "He looked for judgment but behold oppression; for righteousness but behold a cry."

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(2) It is not necessary here to enlarge upon the second type, the message of comfort, as that is the subject of the expositions. It contrasts strongly with the fierce polemics and fiery attacks of the men who preached before the fall of Jerusalem. The caressing tenderness, the lavish use of luxuriant promise is a new note. Compare with the "Song of the Vineyard" this tender appeal :

Fear not, O Jacob my servant ;
And thou, Jeshurun whom I have chosen,
For I will pour water upon the thirsty land,
And streams upon the dry ground ;
I will pour my spirit on thy seed,
And my blessing upon thine offspring ;
And they shall spring up among the grass
As willows by the water courses. (Ch. xliv. 2.)

(3) When the way was open for the exiles to return to Jerusalem those who cast in their lot with the Jewish community faced bitter disappointment and deep despondency. The wonderful promises seemed to have been poetic exaggeration. Haggai and Zechariah cheered the temple-builders, Malachi reasoned with those who were disappointed and sceptical. The note of pure comfort died away and again the sermons contained sharp rebuke. So once more the call comes :

Cry aloud, spare not,
Lift up thy voice like a trumpet,
And declare unto my people their transgression,
And to the house of Jacob their sins. (lviii.)

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(4) From a still later time when the temple has been built and the walls strengthened, the community, rejoicing in the rich revelation and proud of the perfection of its Law (Ps. cxix.) can feel itself secure in the midst of a hostile world, and look forward to the judgment of the *world* as the hour of its final redemption. "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah : we have a strong city ; salvation will be appointed for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth truth may enter in. Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee." (Ch. xxvi. 1.)

IV. THE PROPHET OF CONSOLATION (Deutero-Isaiah, ch. xl-1.). After this slight sketch of varied types of teaching and styles of expression we must fix our attention a little more closely on the work of one who has been called "The Great Unknown." The title has significance only when we compare or contrast him with the original Isaiah about whom we have personal information though no complete biography. The same phrase might with equal justice be applied to the author of the book of Job. The names of many strong men of action and a few great preachers have come down to us : the heroes, glorified in history, are not the thinkers and poets whose works live long after they have passed away. (Sirach xl., Heb. xi.)

This man lived and sent forth his great message about five hundred and forty years before the

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Christian era, but we cannot fix the place of his abode with precision and certainty. In Phœnicia, in Babylon, or partly in Babylon (chaps. xl.-xlviii.) and partly in Jerusalem (chaps. xlix.-lv.)—these conjectures show diversity of opinion on this point among those who agree as to the date. The Babylonian position is strongly stated in the following passage : “ We breathe no longer the spacious atmosphere of Isaiah’s days, the kingdom has fallen, and the people lie prostrate and suffering, almost beyond endurance, though the days of their bondage are nearly ended. The local scenery, too, is far removed from the pleasant hills and valleys of Palestine ; when these are introduced it is with the wistful glance of the exile fondly recalling his native land. The ground trod by the prophet’s feet is the monotonous ground of Babylonia, blistered by the fierce blaze of the unclouded sun, and watered by sluggish streams and channels. The allusions that are thickly scattered through these chapters are likewise Babylonian ; the procession of images, the gods and altars, the diviners and astrologers, the crowd of merchants thronging the bazaars, the shipping, the treasures of gold and silver and precious stones, the trees and plants, even the animals.”¹

Ezekiel, we know, lived in Babylonia and until Jerusalem was destroyed he continued to denounce the ingratitude and infidelity of his own people. When the punishment was complete he preached repentance and predicted a glorious future. He

¹ Dr. A. R. Gordon : *The Faith of Isaiah.*

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is harsh and absolute in the judgment of the past, definite and dogmatic in his picture of the new era. In striking contrast our prophet scarcely exists for us as a man ; we cannot place him in specific local circumstances, or see him facing concrete problems of national or social life. For him the one living God moves supreme in the sphere of history, seeking Israel's redemption. The question is not, how shall Israelites sing Jehovah's songs in a foreign land, but how can the community again come to life in its own home, make Zion once more a living sanctuary and a centre of blessing ? He does not thrust himself forward or describe particular circumstances ; he has a great message but he is more of a poet than a preacher ; he has no startling vision but listens eagerly to the celestial voices. There is not the flaming passion and fierce invective of one standing face to face with a cruel tyrant. There is the haze of distance ; things are seen through a poetic atmosphere. This has its advantages, the gentle message meets an immediate need but it reaches out towards a larger destiny. The new Jerusalem is touched with the light that never was on sea or land ; it becomes the symbol of the eternal city of God.

V. THE Two SUBJECTS OF THESE POEMS (xl.-lv.). Perhaps we should call them two aspects of the one subject ; Zion the Bride of Jehovah, and Israel the Servant of Jehovah. It has been suggested that these were once two separate series of poems with difference of style and

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metre ; a discussion of that kind, however, does not come within the range of our study. The wonderful songs addressed to the city and sanctuary do not call for the careful exposition that we have given to "The Servant passages" for, though they were of primary importance at the time, now they remain as beautiful examples of the perfect union of patriotism and religion. Let the reader go over the three chapters, lii. to liv. and see how side by side with the sorrow and glory of the servant the theme of Zion's redemption and exaltation stirs the prophet's enthusiastic loyalty and lifts him into lyrical ecstatic mood.

How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,
That publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good,
That publisheth the salvation :
That saith to Zion,
Thy God reigneth ! ”
The voice of thy watchmen ; they lift up their voice,
Together do they sing ;
For they shall see, eye to eye,
When Jehovah returneth to Zion.
Break forth into joy, sing together
Ye waste places of Jerusalem :
For Jehovah hath comforted his people,
He hath redeemed Jerusalem.
Jehovah hath made bare his holy arm
In the eyes of all the nations :
And all the ends of the earth shall see
The salvation of our God. (lii. 7ff.)

O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,
Behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours,

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And lay thy foundations with sapphires,
And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies,
And thy gates of carbuncles,
And all thy border of pleasant stones,
And all thy children shall be disciples of Jehovah,
And great shall be the peace of thy children.
In righteousness shalt thou be established :
Thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear,
And from terror, for it shall not come near thee. (liv. 11ff.)

This glowing language in which piety and patriotism are so perfectly blended needs no critical comment ; we can surrender ourselves to enjoyment of these elaborate pictures, knowing that later history has made it impossible for us to rest in the mere material magnificence. Even in his moments of complete concentration on the glory of Zion as the scene of Jehovah's manifestation, the prophet does not lose sight of the outside world, the light of heaven does not shine on Zion for herself alone but that through her it may radiate towards "the ends of the earth." We bear constantly in mind the great saying that neither the mountain in Samaria nor the sanctuary in Jerusalem shall forever hold the pre-eminence (John iv. 21), so we need to remember not only that a local centre was a necessary stage in the growth of religion, but also that the missionary idea has two sides, the power to draw people in and the impulse to send out the truth. Judaism did *attract* many by its inherent purity and strength ; men went up to the city and temple believing that there they could find something that neither Athens nor Rome could give.

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VI. JERUSALEM, THE CITY OF DAVID AND THE CITY OF GOD. Jerusalem has a long eventful history reaching back into the remote past ; and after it came into the possession of the Hebrews it held a central position from the time of David until the days when the Christ trod its streets and wept over its coming doom. David made it the political and religious centre and in course of time it became the most important of the sanctuaries of Israel. The kingdom that he created was soon split into two separate nations which, standing side by side, sometimes hostile and sometimes friendly, pursued each its own career and achieved its own destiny. They were both crushed in turn by foreign foes—Assyria and Babylon—but Jerusalem remained stubborn and persistent. When the territory that the Jews could claim shrank to its smallest limits, the city was still left, a last refuge and hope. In its darkest hours there was a remnant, men who never lost faith in its future, so that it became the heart of the new Judaism, and last of all a place of pilgrimage for the devotees of three religions. As David was its political creator, so Isaiah may be said to have been its spiritual founder. His ministry was the beginning there of a higher, more spiritual faith, a demand that the life of the city should conform to the laws of righteousness and that worship and wickedness should no longer be combined to affront the majesty of God and bring shame upon religion and sorrow upon the people. He commended himself to God and the future time believing that ■ true ministry could

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not fail completely. The book that bears his name presents a wonderful variety of views of Jerusalem, the city in which he lived and worked.

The following selections show us how Jerusalem figured in the poetry of various periods of Judah's history.

(I) THE SONG OF THE CITY (about 730 B.C.)

Isaiah of Jerusalem in the early years of his ministry and all through his life desires to see the power of true religion manifest itself in justice and kindness by those who rule the city.

How is the faithful city
Become an harlot !
Zion that was full of judgment !
Righteousness lodged in her.
Thy silver is become dross,
Thy wine mixed with water.
Thy princes are rebellious,
And companions of thieves,
Everyone loveth gifts,
And followeth after rewards :
They judge not the fatherless,
Neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Therefore saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts,
The Mighty One of Israel,
Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries,
And avenge me of mine enemies,
And I will turn my hand upon thee,
And throughly purge away thy dross,
And I will take away all thy tin
And I will restore thy judges as at the first,
And thy counsellors as at the beginning :
Afterward thou shalt be called the City of Righteousness,
The Faithful City. (i. 21-26.)

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(2) THE WORD OF CONSOLATION TO ZION
(about 540 B.C.). How different must have been the condition that, almost two centuries later, called forth a poem so rich in comfort and so tender in tone as the following—Zion wasted and solitary shall be rebuilt and become the mother of many grateful, enthusiastic children.

But Zion said “ Jehovah hath forsaken me,
And the Lord hath forgotten me.”
Can a woman forget her sucking child,
That she shall not have compassion on the son of her womb ?
Yea, though a woman should forget these,
Yet will not I forget thee.
Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ;
Thy walls are continually before me,
And now thy builders make haste,
While thy destroyers go forth from thee.
Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold :
All these gather themselves and come to thee.
As I live, saith Jehovah,
With all of them thou shalt clothe thee as with an
ornament
And gird thyself with them like a bride.
For, as for thy waste and thy desolate places
And thy land that hath been destroyed,
Surely now shalt thou be too strait for the inhabitants
And they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.
The children of thy bereavement
Shall yet say in thine ears,
This place is too strait for me ;
Give place to me that I may dwell.
Then thou shalt say in thine heart,
Who has borne me these ?
For I am bereaved and barren,
And who hath brought up these ?
Behold I was left alone ;
And these—who then are they ? (xlix. 14-21.)

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(3) At a later time, though it is found at the beginning of the book, we have to place a noble poem which claims for Jerusalem a spiritual supremacy and widespread moral attractiveness. This passage, like many others in the ancient Scriptures, has been unfairly treated by detaching a single verse from its context, the promise of peace. We sometimes forget that the promise is not absolute ; the poet lays down what must be the real condition of peace, the acknowledgement of one God whose law is accepted as binding on all men because it is rooted in reason and righteousness. To the Jew this has to be linked to Jerusalem as the central sanctuary, the special home of the one Eternal God.

JERUSALEM ATTRACTING THE SEEKERS AFTER GOD (Probably about 500 B.C.)

And it shall come to pass in the latter days,
That the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established
In the top of the mountains
And shall be exalted above the hills ;
And all nations shall flow unto it,
And many peoples shall go and say,
“Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah
To the house of the God of Jacob ;
And He will teach us of His ways
And we will walk in His paths :
For out of Zion shall go forth the Law,
And the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.
And He shall judge between the nations,
And shall reprove many peoples,
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks :
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation
Neither shall they learn war any more.” (ii. 2-4.)

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(4) In the vision of world-judgment which is one of the latest parts of "The Book of Isaiah," Jerusalem still holds a central position. The poet speaks of the nations of the world with sympathy and promises that the God of Israel will prepare *in this mountain* a splendid banquet for *all* peoples. To prepare them for the feast Jehovah will take away the veil which is the sign of mourning and wipe away all tears.

THE FESTIVAL OF NATIONS ON MOUNT ZION.

And in this mountain shall Jehovah
Make unto all peoples
A feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees,
Of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well
refined.
And He will destroy in this mountain
The face of the covering that is cast over all peoples,
And the veil that is spread over all nations,
And the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from all faces
And the reproach of His people shall be taken away from off
all the earth
For Jehovah has spoken. (xxv. 6-8) (about 350 B.C.).

VII. THE POET-THEOLOGIAN. The unknown teacher with whose writings we are mainly concerned may be said in one sense to be more of a poet and a theologian than Isaiah of Jerusalem, though he is not so powerful as a poet nor so original as a theologian. That may seem to be a contradictory statement, though the paradox is easily solved when we remember that he was more of a student than a man of affairs; in brooding over

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the process of history and the meaning of life he had the advantage of the great men who had gone before him. He can appeal to the past and claim that the tragic events of his own day are the fulfilment of God's word and that the promise of redemption rests upon the same strong basis. This man of the cloister had his work to do at the time, when the life of Judah presented no sphere for the statesman or social reformer. In our own time we know that men who played no direct part in politics have influenced the religious philosophy of the English-speaking people ; the names of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning illustrate this fact, and to these great names others might be added. The earlier prophets presented their message in the form of poems, mostly short and sharp—they were like the blow of a hammer or the stroke of a sword. Here there is a softness and diffuseness that we do not expect to find in the utterance of men whose life was, as in the case of Isaiah and Jeremiah, one long, fierce conflict with bitter personal enemies.

The advance, as compared with the pre-Exilic prophets, then, is not in literary form or poetic power, but in the spaciousness of the theology and in the tender, intimate manner in which the grace of God is brought to bear upon the weakness and need of the nation in its distress. The demands of the earlier prophets *imply* that the God of Israel is one, and that His call for real righteousness searches deep and is of infinite significance. Here this central truth

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comes to clearer expression ; the whole world of heaven and earth is the sphere of His manifestation, the past gains a larger perspective and the future is claimed for One who knows the end from the beginning. In the hour when the outlook was darkest and the prospect of renewed life seemed quite hopeless this great thought of God is presented as the only source of inspiration and strength. The popular belief that national victory is the sign of real success, and defeat the proof of failure, is met, not by cunning arguments, though arguments are not lacking, but by triumphant songs. It is not the mere music of the songs but the living truth in them that keeps them alive. It has been well said that "The joy of splendid sounds alone avails not ; a poem must have soul and sunshine." The true and the beautiful seek each other ; the men who had a great message sought to express them in appropriate forms, hence those great words which the world refuses to forget.

It may seem strange now to mention "theology" in combination with poetry, because the word has come to be associated with intellectual abstractions from which the real life has fled. In these days we are more interested in the questions which concern society and the soul ; we wish to explore the depths of our personal life and to make a new world. But it would be a mistake to imagine that the subjects which interested our fathers have quite lost their meaning. It is true that the living interests, the burning controversies of one generation may

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become the dead scholasticism of the next. But when, in these conflicts concerning creeds, we have allowed for personal ambitions and party strife, there is a story of stern conviction and loyalty to truth which redeems these controversies from meanness and failure. The theologies that have moved great masses of men have not been artificial inventions, but interpretation of the facts of life ; they are both old and new, they are rooted in a past that stretches far back into the life of humanity. There is some truth in the suggestive remark that, “As the prophet whose prophecy is new in substance is no prophet but a deceiver, so the prophet whose prophecy is old in form is no prophet but a plagiarist.”¹ The strength of this great prophet of the exile certainly lies in this, that his theology is the outcome of the noblest thought of his nation’s past life, while its form is completely dominated by the needs of his own time.

In the study of this subject it is a perpetual surprise that the sweetest songs come out of the sharpest sorrows, or in other words, the larger interpretations of life have been given in the world’s darkest hours. The great calamity comes, political schemes fail, popular beliefs are swept away, the foundations of society are shaken, the cynical cry is heard, “Where is now your God ?”—then the still small voice brings the new word, but its full significance is not seen until the clamour dies away and men face with hopeful patience the tasks of the new day.

¹ *Ecce Homo.*

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VIII. THE SERVANT QUESTION. What is the meaning of the phrase "Servant of Jehovah," the significance of this strange complex figure in this book (Isaiah xl.-lv.) ? It has been a subject of keen enquiry and devout meditation for more than two thousand years. There is nothing startling about the fact that a man or a nation is called "servant of God"; in all periods Jehovah had His servants, men of outstanding position and heroic powers, as Moses, David, and Elijah; the nation also was called to serve Him and the nature of the service stimulated the thought and provoked the protests of the greatest prophets. In fact, the whole upward movement of Israel's religion might be described as a striving after the true answer to the supreme question, "Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God?" (Micah vi. 6). But in this part of the book that bears Isaiah's name, the title, servant of Jehovah, is repeated so often and gathers round itself such a richness of meaning and suggestion that it gives rise to many questions to which divergent answers are given. These may be briefly noted here, though we cannot enter into minute arguments upon a subject that has, during the last generation, called for much controversy. It may help us if we separate the different points that meet us when we survey the whole question.

(1) The oldest Jewish interpretation is that the Servant in this series of poems is Israel, that is, the Hebrew exiles paying the penalty of the past sins of their nation and, through the

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chastening influence of sorrow, being prepared to render service to the world. One testimony to this is the fact that the name "Israel" is found in the Greek version in places where it does not occur in the Hebrew copy. Even if the text in those cases is incorrect it is a witness to an early interpretation.

(2) The earliest Christian use of the prophecy was its application to the life of their Lord by the first disciples. They regarded such passages as predictions which were fulfilled in His ministry. In Matthew iii. 18ff. the beautiful poem Isaiah xlvi. 1-4, is regarded as a prediction or anticipation of His words of wisdom and works of mercy. Students of Scripture, however, do not feel that their acceptance of Jesus Christ as the true Servant hinders them from considering the historical setting and original meaning of the great prophecy.

(3) In recent times it has been found possible by many scholars to blend these different interpretations into one composite picture. We are told that certain texts referred to Israel in its actual condition, others to the nation viewed as the ideal of a redeemed and glorified nation, and where the picture gained intensely personal features it passed into a prophecy of the future Messiah. After a while, this view appeared to be too complicated and artificial for the simplicity and concreteness of Hebrew thought. So the National interpretation came to be very largely accepted by Christian scholars.

(4) It was then proposed to solve the problem by the application of literary criticism, and the

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means employed were to separate the special passages, xlvi. 1-4; xlix. 1-6; li. 4-9; lii. 13-liii. 12, assigning them to a different author and a later date. With this was generally united the individual interpretation, the picture of an ideal teacher and sufferer. These poems are supposed to have found their way into this book because they were in harmony with, and, in fact, were a development of the main subject of the book. It was claimed that they were more personal than anything found elsewhere, that the style lacked the impetuous rush and diffuseness of Deutero-Isaiah, and that the teaching is more advanced. This suggestion has considerable attraction; it is not easy to disprove it, but it has not gained general acceptance.

(5) Recently a German scholar¹ has published a small book supporting the theory of a young Norwegian writer,² that in these poems the prophet speaks of himself. This possibility was suggested a very long time ago; in Acts viii. 34 we read, "I pray thee of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself or of some other?" (See Exposition XII.). Gunkel expresses surprise that the true explanation has lingered so long and is driven to the conclusion that commentators instead of throwing light upon the book have often wandered in the darkness and led their readers astray. According to this view the prophet represents himself as passing through an experience similar to that which came to our Lord; patient

¹ H. Gunkel.

² S. Mowinckel, cf. Stanley A. Cook, *Expository Times*, July, 1923.

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submission to rejection and torture for the sake of others with confident anticipation of complete vindication and final glory (cf. Luke xxiv. 26). It is interesting to have the great thoughts of the poems reviewed once more even if we do not share this scholar's confidence that the final solution is so simple.

(6) This survey may be apt to create in the mind of the reader the impression that such critical study is exceedingly difficult and in its results hampered by an uncomfortable lack of certainty. Over against this may be set two things : (a) for those who can patiently examine the arguments with close attention to the texts there is the reward of a clearer view of the prophetic teaching ; (b) and, as we shall see, the uncertainty as to date and authorship does not affect the validity of the great truths revealed ; the ideals of service were fulfilled in the life of the Christ, and await a further realisation in our personal and social life.

IX. CRITICISM AND EXPOSITION. There is one thing clear, namely, that without such careful study real exposition is not possible, and that unless we have interpretation in accordance with the light of our own times the Old Testament must lose something of its spiritual power. The effects of that loss would be felt also in other spheres of religious thought. There will always be the small circle of special students and the large number of devout readers, but that is not enough ; the stream of living teaching must play

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constantly upon the mind of the Church to keep alive the sense of a living revelation. Demanding belief in "inspiration" in itself will not meet the case; intelligent interpretation will show that the ancient literature is inspiring as well as inspired, that its power to quicken intelligence and purify emotion is as fresh as ever. This demands toil but it yields results intellectual and spiritual of high value. The popular preacher and the social reformer have their place, but the quiet thoughtful teacher must maintain his position in the Church to preserve its vital connection with the classic sources of our faith, and to keep alive our communion with the saints of the past. The need for this is all the greater since many of the dominant influences of our time are unfavourable to severe study and quiet meditation.

We cannot expect that a collection of poems will have close connection and perfect unity, but it is agreed that here these features are sufficiently marked to allow us to call these chapters (xl.-lv.) a book,—“The Book of Consolation.” The author places the sorrow of the exile in relation to Jehovah’s eternal purpose. He shows the helplessness of idolatry and magic even in the splendid forms that these assumed in Babylon. Whether all the servant passages relate to Israel or not, he calls Israel to a larger service and to a nobler view of her election. Because Jehovah is ruler of the world He can choose His own means and has appointed Cyrus, the Persian King, to be “the anointed one,” (Messiah), who shall be the

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means of giving deliverance to Israel and so opening the way to the new chapter in her history ; at this point, the prophet shows his freedom from narrow national prejudices and he feels that this part of his message may meet with opposition from the jealous patriotism that could monopolise God (xlv. 4ff. and 9ff). This prejudice calls forth the severest rebuke from a prophet whose words are generally kind and consolatory (xlviii. 8). The work of God's servant and the future glory of Zion are set forth with rich eloquence in the language of enthusiastic, unquestioning faith. The poet comes back at the close to that which gives him confidence in the beginning, and upon which he rests all his teaching : "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth ; but the word of our God shall stand forever " (xl. 8 ; lv. 10).

II

The Expositions

I

The Challenge and Consolation of a Great Theology

(Isaiah xl.)

I. THE POET PREACHER. The poems, which begin in this chapter and continue their great subject to the end of chapter fifty-five, are among the choicest specimens of Hebrew literature for keenness of insight, triumphant faith and beauty of expression. The land is desolate, the city destroyed, the temple desecrated, the people scattered; in the face of this overwhelming distress the prophet strikes the keynote of his great discourse by declaring that the heavenly voices call him to deliver a message of comfort. This poet-preacher expresses his teaching in picturesque forms and often, as its beauty sets his own soul on fire, bursts into exultant song. The nameless prophet thus reveals his soul as, with his wonderful gifts, he seeks to mediate between a merciful God and a suffering people. He is lifted above the depressing circumstances; from an atmosphere vocal with heavenly message, melodious with inspiring song, his consoling word descends like gentle dew to transform and

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beautify the barren land. The outward circumstances are so hopeless that there seems to be little basis for any faith in the nation's future destiny. The nation has, in the material sense, lost everything and it thinks that it has lost its God. It is this prophet's work to show that God abides and that the nation possesses something that cannot be lost.

2. THE NEW NOTE IN PROPHECY. As a real preacher he is not satisfied with the repetition of ideas and words spoken to a past generation. When the life of the nation was in full swing, the prophets attacked with fiery indignation the political crookedness, social corruption and showy ritualism of the day. They hurled anathemas against false leaders and foolish people ; they declared that because of the righteousness of God stern and terrible judgments were inevitable. But, as we have seen in our own day, new circumstances demand new teaching ; the righteousness of God does not change, but its application to the life of the community assumes different forms. It meant formerly condemnation of wickedness ; it means now the consolation of weakness. There was a time when the prophets would have scorned "comfortable words," now they are the direct command of their God (Isaiah xl. 12, cf. Zech. i. 13).

Amos and Micah were of necessity heralds of judgment and messengers of doom ; their denunciation of national arrogance and self-satisfied religiosity still have a place, but that is

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not the *whole* of God's word. The sorrow and scepticism of the exiles need a different message. The sorrow is real, they are deeply wounded in their patriotism and their piety ; the scepticism tends to render them hopeless because they cannot reconcile this great disaster with their belief in the power and justice of their God. How dark the outlook was may be learned from the desponding tone that the prophet attributes to them.

Why sayest thou, O Jacob,
And speakest, O Israel ;
My way is hid from Jehovah
And my judgment is passed over from my God ? (xl. 27.)

Against the background of deep disappointment and black despair the prophet utters his great message of consolation and hope : "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." He writes in poetic measure, but the power of the sermon lies not alone or chiefly in the pleasant music and noble rhetoric ; it is rather in this great idea of God and the vigorous call to noble service. Its bold vision, its clarion call to a larger task must have been startling to a people in the hour of defeat. There is no morbid brooding over sorrow, little vain lamentation over past failures, no intellectual subtleties concerning the mysteries of free will and fate ; simply a clear, strong assertion of God's sovereign mercy. He calls men to look up to the heavens and out upon the great world sustained by the sense of the Divine Presence. Smaller questions of ritual and law are not present and pressing ;

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they are only touched in a faint allusive fashion (xl. 16). The revival message of the prophet rests upon a clearer vision of the divine purpose. The visible machinery through which the nation expressed its life has, in the meantime, broken down. Man cannot climb to heaven and seize the new Kingdom. God must come down and make a new manifestation of His electing grace. A new creation is needed and there is only one Creator. The great thoughts that move with such strength and beauty through this chapter may sound commonplace to us because they have been pressed into formulas and packed into dogmatic systems ; it is well to go back from the dried specimens to the living forest and catch the vital atmosphere. Facing again the historical circumstances we realise that it is not merely a matter of fine-sounding words preserved in books, but of forces that moulded the ancient world and prepared the way for still larger thoughts of God.

The prophet claims that the God who sends this message of consolation, this call to service, is the creator of the world. World or "universe" did not mean the same to him as it does to the man of science to-day ; the conception of the ordered universe has grown to such vast proportions that the early schemes of scientific thought shrink into childish littleness. He, however, claimed for Israel's God lordship in the largest sense that was then possible. The Babylonians, the proud conquerors of Israel, worshipped the stars, but he can ask, knowing that there is only one answer, "Lift up your

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eyes on high, and see who hath created these ? ” Superior persons might smile contemptuously at this great claim made by so small a people, but history has justified this sublime faith and illustrated the truth that the measure of great things is not material size but spiritual quality. The thought of creation here is that of a present process, not the survey of a scheme of things completed long ago (Gen. i.) ; we feel the pulse of a living, creative force. It would be an exaggeration to represent the prophet as teaching a specific doctrine of the relation of God and nature ; but to him the world of nature is not cold mechanism, Jehovah is not an absentee God. As he not only thinks of the infinite God but also *feels* the divine presence, an idol seems such a vain thing, and material sacrifice shrinks into insignificance (xl. 16). A faith that uses the spacious sky and the unnumbered stars as its simplest symbols does not lose its sublimity. Behind the splendid impressive scenery of the heavens there is one

That bringeth out their hosts by number :
He calleth them all by their names :
Because of His great might and strong power
There is not one missing. (xl. 26.)

3. THE GOD OF HISTORY. One of the strongest features of Hebrew religion is the prophetic interpretation of history. It is based upon a great historical fact, Jehovah’s choice of Israel through Moses. Repeated appeals are made to the guidance of God in the past as calling for

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gratitude and loyalty in the present. This truth, which is so nobly presented in Deuteronomy viii. is one of the greatest contributions of the Old Testament to the religious thought of the world. It is not so much a philosophy of history as a religious faith, but it gives unity and meaning to the life of Israel, and later enters into our noblest creeds. This is still a truth of faith, not a demonstration of science. We have a deeper vista behind us and a larger outlook before us and these should help us to face the present crisis. But life is not a matter of mere intellectual calculation ; the lessons of history cannot be appropriated in a mechanical manner. It is ordained that help should come to us in facing our peculiar difficulties through the memory of men who in other days fought similar battles.

The power that gives meaning to history is "the word of God," the purpose and plan of the Eternal King (cf. chapter iv.). It was believed long before his time that God speaks to men in many ways but in these poems "the word" is handled in a new way, and receives a peculiar quality. It is no common-place utterance of the solemn fact of our individual mortality that the poet gives us in the words :

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth :
But the word of our God shall stand for ever. (xl. 8.)

He is boldly contrasting the temporary and the eternal ; in his own way he anticipates the belief that there is a kingdom that cannot be moved (Heb. xii. 28). The contrast is between the

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changing kingdoms of the world and the abiding word of Israel's God. Nineveh has fallen; Babylon is about to fall; but though these catastrophes shake the world, the whole world known to the prophet, something divine has entered into the life of humanity; it persists and grows. If there was in those empires any element of good it has not been utterly lost, and to Israel there has been given a special treasure to be held in trust for humanity. These great thoughts, God in creation and history, may seem to us, in our dull moments, quite common-place; we need the prophetic vision and poetic fire that makes all things new. We need also to remind ourselves that these simple elements of our faith were, at one time, actually new, that it needed real insight and inspiration to make possible these interpretations of life. Since they were first revealed, many great empires, magnificent embodiment of earthly power, have had their day and crumbled into dust, but the nation to whom this word was addressed has accomplished its strange, tragic destiny. To many the wonderful experience of this strange homeless people is one of the most striking manifestations of what we call Providence. The devout Jew still looks back and says with an enthusiasm that is tinged by sadness, "the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, departed not from before the people" (Ex. xiii. 22).

4. THEOLOGY AND LIFE. In this wonderful chapter (xl.) there is no mention of the great

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thoughts of election and service that are to play such a part in these poems. The prophet is laying well the foundation of his later teaching ; he strikes the keynote in words of cheer, varied in form but all seeking to inspire new hope. To the cities of Judah comes the cry to which such fulness of meaning is not given, "Behold your God!" The Hebrew prophets could not live on soft sentiment ; their golden visions had to rest upon a strange creed. If the word "creed" is not popular now, that does not alter the fact that faith must have intellectual as well as spiritual elements. The prophet realises that true consolation can come only through an increase of spiritual life, and that this life can be quickened and intensified only through a larger thought of God. The service of such a God cannot be merely local and parochial ; its relation to the Supreme Power must lift it into the world-wide sphere. Suffering embraced within His plan must be more than penal or purgatorial, it becomes sacrificial when it is a preparation for unselfish service. When all allowances are made on account of natural limitations, sectarian narrowness, and other tenacious forms of human weakness, a great thought of God constantly impels the believer to a larger outlook and a nobler vision.

This man's message is to the defeated nation ; he is not a pastor or organiser, but the principle involved in his great sermon applies also to the personal life. The basis of our comfort must be the same ; it must rest upon a view of God and

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the world that links our little life to the eternal sphere. The world's distractions, stimulants and soporifics may aggravate instead of relieving a great sorrow. It is not by escaping but by accepting the beneficent law of sacrifice that men find real redemption. To men who had been caught in the whirlpool of a great national disaster the prophet declared the presence of the living God, a great purpose running through past history and a plan of future redemption. The Cross represents the same principle, not helpless and hopeless resignation, but the faith that conquers the world by giving itself to the world's service. It is because the prophet presents a pure monotheism and can give the divine message, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (xlv. 22) that he can, linking Israel's redemption to God's world plan, burst into the triumphant song :

" And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return
And come with singing unto Zion ;
And everlasting joy upon their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (li. 11.)

II

A Nobler View of Election (Isaiah xli. 8)

But thou, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen ;
The seed of Abraham my friend ;
Thou whom I have taken hold of from the end of the earth,
And called thee from the corners thereof,
And said unto thee, Thou art my servant,
I have chosen thee and not cast thee away.

I. THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL. It is quite clear from this passage that the prophet claims for Israel a prominent place in the world as a servant of God ; from the tone and spirit of his teaching we are justified in saying that, while he does not lose the thought of privilege, he gives new prominence to the idea of responsibility. This call is addressed to "Israel my servant," and "the seed of Abraham my friend." But the responsibility is not for the payment of tithe and the observance of ritual—these things he holds lightly ; the service he has in view is nobler in its quality and wider in its scope. Here is clear recognition of the divine call and election as the basis of Israel's life and as the source of her

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highest inspiration. This thought is not new, it runs through the Old Testament in prophecy and story ; sometimes it is used as a call to loyalty and at other times as a reproach for unfaithfulness. In our prophecy it reaches its loftiest heights and its noblest expression.

Election, thus conceived, is not an abstract doctrine but a vital truth, not for an age but for all time ; what else could have such quickening power in the hour of darkness, when both liberty and religion were in extreme danger ? Promises given in this spirit helped men to bear burdens which would otherwise have been intolerable. Despairing men clung to the conviction that, in spite of all appearances, God's election could not fail. To us it may seem incredible that to a nation actually on the verge of extinction these words could be spoken ;

When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee ;
And through the rivers they shall not overflow thee :
When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be
burned,
Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (ISAIAH xlivi. 2.)

Under the influence of this conviction martyrs have nerved themselves for the last tremendous effort that has saved the cause and blessed the world ; at such times all talk of man's power, his clever contrivances and skilful organisation seems an impertinence ; a nation in ruins, a Church in distress must call mightily on the God who rules the world. The despairing cry, " O Lord how long ? " pierces to the heavens, and in

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some way the message of comfort comes and the hour of redemption draws nigh. Even when the deliverance is delayed, the faith that keeps men firm through the darkest hours renders a service to the distant generations. It is one of our noblest sources of spiritual stimulus to look back upon those glorious hours in the world's history, when men have led the forlorn hope because they believed that their own small life rested on the eternal purpose of an Almighty God. Such an hour was this Babylonian exile, when, in the face of worldly splendour, pretentious religion and military greatness, the prophet declared his faith in the abiding significance of his own weak and scattered nation. A similar experience that threatened an even more dreadful fate was met some centuries later by the same teaching in the Book of Daniel. The Syrian king might desecrate the temple and slaughter the saints, but only so far could he go in a world that is ruled by the decrees of heaven. When the early Christians went forth to face cruel tyranny and relentless persecution, they were comforted by that great dramatic presentation of God's rule that we call "The Revelation"; and in later struggles and reformations the powers of the world have been met in the same spirit; men who bowed in penitence before God fought proudly against oppression on behalf of the sacred privilege of freedom. That which gave them their inflexible determination was the clear conviction that they were grasped by a divine purpose which could use the weak things to confound the

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mighty. This doctrine of election may have been held in hard and fantastic forms, it may have been clouded with bewildering subtleties or have degenerated into fanatic fatalism. But these are perversions or extravagances to which all great truths are liable ; they do not alter the fact that here we have the fundamental religious idea which knits the world into an ordered unity, appoints the destiny of nations and gives dignity to the personal life.

There are scattered flashes of this great light in the words of ancient thinkers and in the books of other nations ; in the Old Testament it appears as a continuous, growing revelation which shines more and more unto the perfect day. To the very last it is coloured by the life and experience of the nation through which it came ; in primitive times it may be limited in its range, and in latest days it may be held in a narrow temper. It is never ■ pure intellectual form, it is always clothed in flesh and blood. The way in which it is presented is always influenced by the needs of men to be met and the souls of men to be satisfied ; or in other words it comes before us in this literature as living teaching not as theological speculation. Yet it is theology in a very deep sense, it is an attempt to solve the great problem of life by bringing the divine will and purpose to bear upon it. The world is seen to have unity, history becomes a continuous movement, sorrow is lifted into a new light, and the personal life attains real value when the idea of God is made the centre of man's

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meditation. All these lines of thought we can see working themselves out as Israel comes to the consciousness of her vocation and responds to the prophetic message. The revelation is all the more instructive and powerful because it comes to us in the forms of a human experience which differs from and yet is strongly like our own.

The early tribe fighting for a home, the kingdom welded together of diverse elements, the prophetic movement which seeks to soften the discords of changing social conditions, the new Church which desires a purer symbolism ; through all these the same energetic idea throbs, the conviction that God is calling to a larger life. Men knew themselves to be in some sense free, though they did not argue about it, but for them the greatest fact was the pressure of the divine will and purpose upon their lives. Through this came duty and destiny, the meaning of service and the possibility of success ; that which was ordained could be accomplished and must be carried to its completion by men who yielded themselves to the impulse of the living spirit.

2. GROWTH AND ENLARGEMENT OF THE IDEA.
It is scarcely possible for us to be present at the actual birth-hour of any really great truth, though we may trace, with some degree of clearness, variations in its later history, as it enlarges and adapts itself to new circumstances. At first it may be that election concerned only Israel and Jehovah. Other territories were under the sway of other powers ; other nations had their

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own gods. These things were not matters of speculation or discussion. The vital matter was that the Israelites should in practice be loyal to the God of their fathers, shunning "abominations"—that is, things that belong to other gods and religions—and keeping clear from the contamination of evil spirits and strange customs. Jehovah belonged to Israel completely even as this nation belonged to Him. But even this faith has a living, lofty character, it is not crude nature-worship or mere tradition. When we first meet it, it is the intelligent creed of strong men, and the birth of the nation is ascribed to a deliberate choice, a gracious gift, an abiding covenant. Here is a moral element that has in it the promise of great things. This is a sublime thought of God that cannot die when once it has been grasped by earnest souls.

The familiar phrase "the God of our Fathers" has for us very noble suggestions and sacred associations; through the long centuries it has become luminous with ever larger meanings. In the early, simple stories also it demands a noble interpretation. Custom played a great part and often exerted a tyrannical power in those days, but there is more than mere custom in this; there is something living at the heart of it. We need not, in this connection, worry ourselves about the literal historicity of that great figure, Abraham, the reputed father of the race and founder of the religion. It is vain to deny that the narratives concerning him come from a much later time than any in which he can be supposed

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to have lived, and that he is viewed in an ideal light and made the representative of varied truths. But in this case it is "the ideal light" that we are seeking, the ideal, namely, that the father of a real nation, the founder of a true religion goes forth to unknown regions because of the divine election and under the pressure of a powerful call. What lies in the distant future is dim, whereunto this thing will grow no man can tell; but this is clear, that unless his life is to be warped and wasted the man must not be "disobedient unto the heavenly vision." This is the testimony of Hebrew prophets, and of men of vision in all ages; they trace their call and ascribe their strength to the fact that they can, in all humility, speak of themselves as "the elect of God." The basis of Isaiah's ministry is "the vision of the king"; in the case of the later prophet, Jeremiah, this is accompanied by a definite explicit statement of personal predestination (Jer. i. 5).

In later times when the nation has won its home and formed its character under the influence of this belief, the belief itself gains a larger scope and richer content. The prophets in fighting ritualism and corruption in their own land have laid down principles that apply to other peoples, moral principles that imply the presence of the same God and the same severe demands of righteous law. The historians gathering up the precious records of the past have found in this thought of election the clue to the meaning of history. Here we

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reach what might be called in more pretentious language, the beginning of "a philosophy of history." History is not a list of disconnected facts, it is a living movement, there is a thread of divine purpose running through it; for the Israelite teachers that which gives unity and meaning to the story of the past is God's call to the nation.

At first this is simply a call to be a nation, to become a community whose bond of union is a common faith in Jehovah.

Then there came the call to show this union in a purer worship and a nobler national life; Israel must free herself from the impurities and superstitions of her neighbour. Through this appeal for righteousness the thought grows that Jehovah cannot be held within the boundaries of Israel's territory or the limits of Israel's life. "God of our Fathers, known of old" becomes the God of heaven and earth. But the special relation to Israel cannot be lost; if she no longer monopolises Jehovah, there must be found an expression which maintains the earlier faith and fits into the framework of the larger world; this is "election," God's sovereign grace and purpose which gives a special place to the nation that He has called and trained. This view keeps hold of the past, continues to do justice to the meaning of history, but at the same time makes room for the larger view as to the relation of Israel's God to the outside world. Election thus came slowly to mean Israel's special relation to the God of the whole world.

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3. LATER APPLICATIONS OF THIS GREAT THOUGHT. The thought of election has ever since played a great part in all real religion and in every noble theology. The keenest thinkers have felt that while, in all our statements, man's freedom and responsibility ought to be preserved, God must for practical as well as intellectual purposes be presented in His true light, as the centre of life and the source of all good. This final question about free will and fate can never be settled once for all ; it is good for men to wrestle with it, and each new age must find its own way of stating the balance between these two great truths that God is sovereign and that man is free. The prophets are preachers rather than philosophers, they accept both these truths, but in those days the creating and electing power of Jehovah naturally received the fullest expression. There are several reasons for this. First, the kingly aspect of the divine nature was most prominent, and absolute power belonged to this. The statement : "Was not Esau Jacob's brother ? saith the Lord ; yet I loved Jacob ; but Esau I hated," etc. (Mal. i. 3), did not sound so harsh and arbitrary to ancient as to modern ears. Neither our intellect nor our conscience can be quite stilled by the dogmatic statement, "He does it simply because it is His will." We wish to find reason and love in all the divine dealings.

Secondly, the election was mainly national and had to do with this life ; it regulates the great drama of history on the stage of the present world. When we meet the election of individuals, it is not

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the question of their early destiny that is raised ; it is always a choice to a particular service, as the choice of Cyrus in the realm of politics and of Jeremiah in the sphere of religious service. Thus curious and perplexing problems over which much strength has been spent had not yet emerged ; the doctrine of election is a simple but splendid affirmation of God's rule over nature and human life. In this prophecy it is made the basis of a rich evangelical message, a majestic word of comfort. What kind of a God is this who has chosen Israel ? He is not like the paltry idols that call for pity and almost provoke contempt by their helplessness. He is the maker of heaven and earth. He knows the end from the beginning. He guides the present and declares the future before it has come to pass. His word is a living force, a world-power, it fulfils itself in all spheres and gains an ever-increasing power.

The history of the past proves that He chose the people for a high purpose and that He has been teaching them great lessons. It would be folly to think that He who gave this great revelation can fail to accomplish His supreme purpose. The very hopelessness of the situation and the fact that the circumstances are completely beyond the skill or strength of man is a reason, not for despair, but for throwing all weight upon that divine purpose which is so clearly revealed in the history of the past. We need to spur our imagination in order to realise the splendour, one might almost say, the audacity, of this faith.

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This prophet stands up in an hour when, according to all reliable appearances, the great hopes of the past have been completely shattered, and he asserts that by faith in God's electing grace all these appearances may be despised, and the world's cruel pride put to shame. More than two millenniums have passed away, and we have to declare that his faith has been abundantly justified, and if the fulfilment has been slower it has also been larger than that of which he dreamed.

4. ELECTION AND EVOLUTION. In recent times the word "*evolution*" has been more popular than the word *election*. If the men who fought great battles for us and handed down to us their strong comprehensive creeds magnified election as the supreme, if not the only solution of life's mysteries, many in our day are inclined to give an equally one-sided emphasis to evolution. On a full and calm review it may turn out that they are not contradictory but complementary; in other words, that one supplies what the other lacks. What is the difference between them? It is not, as we at first suppose, that one is theological and the other scientific, for they may both be theological and scientific. The one speaks of the power, the other of the process; one lays stress on the purpose behind all life, the other on the gradual unfolding from the simple to higher forms of life. It may seem strange but it is instructive to note that when held in an extreme form they really come to the same thing. Here is another case where extremes meet, and

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where we must earnestly struggle to avoid "the falsehood of extremes." Mohammedanism or "high Calvinism" in their attempts to exalt God may end in a cold fatalism; but a shallow evolutionism, treating the world as mere mechanism, may, by another road, reach the same end. It is to some of our modern views of Nature as an endless chain of mechanical causes and effects that the phrase "Calvinism without God" might well be applied. But we rejoice that neither the preacher nor the man of science need be driven to accept such a lifeless world; we may receive all new facts and yet feel that the words of the Eternal, "I have chosen thee," have now a richer meaning.

A simple expository discourse is not the place for the discussion of technical science or formal philosophy; it is sufficient for us to affirm our own conviction that the new science can live with the old prophecy, and that each will be quickened and enlarged by the close contact and communion. No where more clearly than in the Old Testament itself do we find the election working through the evolution; the slow growth of a great body of permanent truths through the action of the divine purpose of grace and revelation. This may be found in varied spheres and other nations but here surely we have a supreme illustration. The Hebrew prophet recognised this to some extent in nature, history, and human life. He did not know or anticipate our detailed investigations and complex problems, but in his own way he knew that God had revealed Himself

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by different names and in advancing stages. He believed that the history of the world and the whole of human life was embraced in and vitalised by the purpose of One who knew the end from the beginning. To him there were no hard divisions between the Church and the world, law and miracle, nature and spirit ; the whole movement was wonderful and sacred because of the ever present energy and activity of One whose name is "Holy," or as we say, Divine. Can we wonder that the foundation of the servant's vocation and ministry is so strong, when we see that it rests not on any shifting sands of human opinion or earthly fashion but on the eternal rock ? The nation was not destroyed and its service was not lost because its real representatives could say :

The eternal God is thy dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms. (DEUT. xxxiii. 27.)

III

Redemption The Basis of Service

(Isaiah xliv. 21-23 ; xlvi. 6, 7.)

Remember these things, O Jacob ;
And Israel, for thou art my Servant.
I have formed thee ; thou art my servant.
O Israel thou shalt not be forgotten of me.

I Jehovah have called thee unto righteousness
And will hold thine hand,
I form thee, and make thee.
For ■ covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.

I. THE EVANGELICAL SPIRIT. Each of these passages is interesting and suggestive in itself, but it is as well to study them together as there is a real relation between them. The prophet gives his message in a series of poems and not as a rounded system of theology, but there is in it a living unity and an organic connection. Of the two statements now before us, the one that occurs first in the book must be placed second, when we are considering the order of thought and of life.

The redemption and vindication of the servant comes first and, next, as growing out of it, his redeeming work which is large in its scope and

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glorious in its results. That this is not a strained interpretation may be seen from a careful consideration of the opening chapter (xl. 1, 2), where the promise of forgiveness and deliverance is placed in the forefront. This is the true evangelical order and it reminds us that there is a living gospel in the Old Testament. We must not press the contrast between Law and Gospel to such an extent that we are led to regard the earlier stage as one of mere legalism. If by the Gospel we mean the great truth that God comes in pity to man's penitence, that He has sympathy for the sorrowful, that He gives living strength before He expects loyal service—then, we may maintain that the Old Testament is rich in evangelical elements, and that these are to be found not only in dim symbols or uncertain allegories, but in the living faith that underlies its stories and sermons. In an expository discourse it is both appropriate and instructive to note the difference between the simpler form and the advanced revelation, but that need not lessen our appreciation of the fact that the same living principle is struggling to find embodiment in human life. For example, in early days, Israel's God appears as the father of the nation. This is not a crude conception of physical Fatherhood but a symbol of the choice and covenant; in later times the individual person becomes more distinct from family and tribe and reaches out into deeper realms of spiritual experience and communion with God. Such words as "salvation," "redemption," "righteousness," all

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have at different stages their own shade of meaning and their special atmosphere. To note this special sense is not useless pedantry or verbal quibbling, for it shows us how the great ideas of our creed have been given by God and have grown into man's life and literature; through strange struggles and complex conditions they have been wrought into the very texture of Christian thought and experience. But for the moment we are concerned mainly with this evangelical principle that forgiveness and redemption come first and that out of the life so inspired there arises service to God and man.

In one of the most beautiful chapters of St. John's Gospel, we have the picture of the impulsive Peter refusing to allow the Master to be his servant and only yielding to the gentle constraint of the words: "Unless I wash thy feet thou hast no part in me." There the principle stands out in all its clearness and strength; the basis of our service, the source of our power is the fact that God has stooped down to treat us tenderly and meet our pressing needs. Not only are we taught that the highest form of service to God is not Church ritual, but humanitarian service, but we may see that this is a principle struggling for expression in the Old Testament and finding its full realisation in the life of the Christ. But behind that there is the truth that this desire and power to serve men comes in its richest measure to those who know that they have been redeemed by divine grace. Later Judaism turned hard in some of its features and came to

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regard salvation not so much as a free gift, but as a thing merited and acquired by painful penances. Christian theologians have also spent much strength over the question of faith and works ; a question that becomes vain and helpless, if we forget that

merit lives from man to man
And not from man, O Lord, to Thee.

2. THE REAL ORDER OF EXPERIENCE. In the Old Testament, then, the true relation between man and God is prophesied in the sense that it appears clearly, even if in a somewhat different form. The nation is called out of Egypt to be a Son and a Servant. Abraham, the father of the race, is represented as going forth to the unknown future, in the spirit of faith, under the impulse of a Divine call. The great prophets declare that goodness, not ritual, is the essence of religion, and that this goodness is dependent on a living faith, the only source of strength and stability. In this great prophecy (Isaiah xl.-lv.) the movement is from God to man ; man does not climb to heaven to grasp the blessing, God's thoughts concerning mercy and redemption are high as the heavens above our feeble thought and faltering speech. As an introduction to the "Ten words," where we are accustomed to find "the reign of law" in the sternest sense, we meet the glorious preamble :

I am Jehovah thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

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We do well then, to place, as the background of these two texts, the thought that is suggested by placing them side by side, viz., this : it is only the redeemed man or nation that can go forth into the world with redeeming power ; in other words, what a man or nation can do depends upon character.

(a) ISRAEL THE REDEEMED. Here we have a call to remember, to think upon the creative power of God, the source of life, and realise what is involved in this fundamental fact. This is a call to behold in the supreme position Israel's God who is the only Rock and in whose presence all idols of man's making are quite contemptible. This nation has been formed to be a witness of the Divine power and a servant of the Divine Wisdom. To fall short of this ideal is to be false to the very purpose of its being. The great God is not content to reveal His splendour in the heavens, He seeks to express the eternal will in the lowly life of man. In extreme circumstances a mother may forget her helpless child, but in no case will God forget His people and the purpose for which they were created and called. Here once more is found a sure resting place in times of storm ; the nation in its hour of sorrow seems to be forgotten, but that is only seeming ; the prophet who judges righteous judgment can see through the present failure to the future glory. (xliv. 14.)

Here we have the three stages of the free salvation : forgiveness, restoration, joy. Israel

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had rebelled, followed evil counsellors and pursued vain courses, but in the far country, the land of exile, she is followed by a father's love. The promise of forgiveness comes unexpected and unsought. There are no conditions; it is a spontaneous outburst of the divine love. It is God who blots out the transgressions, makes them to disappear as the clouds before the sun. The people had felt the heavy burden of sin, had groaned under a load of transgressions, had suffered the consequences of sins from preceding generations. Their God had come to appear to them as one who was either too weak or too cruel to stem the tide of misfortune. No small argument can meet this case, only an authoritative declaration of the divine love which brings the miracle of mercy and blessing. How else could it come? Not from the strength of the nation which is utterly exhausted, not from the offering of sacrifices which are as nothing in the presence of this great God. This message spoken in faith attests itself to the weary and helpless. They cry how foolish and ungrateful for us to think that we were forgotten; surely it is the very nature of our own God to love and to forgive.

When we know that He has redeemed us we can return with fresh faith to a consecrated life. "To redeem" may mean to deliver, to avenge, to vindicate. It is the duty of the blood-relation, the next of kin. It promises great things. It means a restoration to all the fulness of life. In those days even more than now, a sufferer was in

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“disgrace.” What could be thought of a God whose people were scattered and disheartened? Israel must be restored to larger life and vindicated before the world. But the inward blessing must come first; if it is true that the chosen nation must not suffer defeat and final destruction, it is also true that worldly success cannot be the supreme test and the result of salvation. The great thing is the forgiveness, the restored communion with God, the new hope that transforms the prison house into a temple of God. There are times, however, in the life of the Church when men with fierce energy lay hold of the truth that God is the vindicator of His people and in the strength of it face the world and wait the decisive hour.

Where there is such hope it bursts out into song or stirs a sweet melody in the heart. Our prophet is apt, at any moment, “to break forth into singing;” while he is musing on some great thought the fire burns and his tongue discourses of redemption in musical tones. This is natural, joy is only another name for life; this may vary in its forms of expression, but without it we languish and die. Joy is of the essence of religion; by it the hope that “springs eternal in the human breast” is strengthened and glorified.

Sing, ye heavens, for Jehovah hath done it,
Shout, ye lower parts of the earth;
Break forth into singing, ye mountains,
O forest, and every tree therein,
For Jehovah hath redeemed Jacob,
And will glorify Himself in Israel. (xli. 25.)

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This is no small sectarian song ; it is not confined to a cloistered place ; it resounds through the world ; it claims kinship with heaven and earth. The God of redemption is also the God of nature ; the song in its new strength rises to the heavens and flows throughout the earth, it makes the mountains vocal and wakes the echoes in the dense forest. A faith that can sing in the face of sorrow and exult in the coming kingdom as already present is a power that draws its inspiration from the deepest, divinest sources. Such a religion the world always needs ; there is enough of sickly thought and brooding melancholy ; there are many jingling songs that die away at the approach of fierce conflict, but "Jehovah's song" when men learn to sing it in the foreign lands of oppression, unbelief and persecution, gains new power and enters into universal life. The theme of the song is that of the sermon :

For Jehovah hath redeemed Jacob
And will glorify Himself in Israel. (xli. 23.)

Through the redemption of His people, turning their sorrow into a noble discipline, revealing to them the meaning of the past, and leading them into a larger future, thus making the divine presence penetrate and illumine the lowly human life, will God glorify Himself.

(b) THE SERVANT AS REDEEMER. Not in mere passive reception of blessings, but in active energetic ministry does the renewed song show its

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life and reveal its character. The basis of it is God's call and redemption of the nation—"I, Jehovah, have called thee in righteousness and will hold thine hand." Then comes the service: they are called for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles. To this general statement there is added a more specific ministry "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." There may be considerable difference of opinion as to the precise application of these phrases in which the service is defined, but there are some important points that are quite clear. If these words apply to Israel's redemption they are also symbolic of Israel's work. It is certain that Israel, upon whom the rich promises of redemption have been lavished so freely, is now called to a corresponding service.

The service to be rendered is similar in nature to that which has been received. If Israel is to be released from the prison house and have her blind eyes opened it is that she may hold a central position in the world and give light to the nations. So once more we are assured that election is not merely to privilege, but also to service. The redemption does not find its full meaning in the person of the redeemed one, through him it seeks a larger sphere. The service is a wide one; this passage claims for Israel a mediatorial character and a missionary activity. This nation is not merely "a people of the covenant" or "a covenanted people"; it is further "a

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covenant of the people" and a "light for the nations." Not all at once could the full meaning of this deep truth be realised. It was natural for nations in the ancient times to have an exclusive interest in their god. Even among Christian nations, where in theory it is distinctly held that the same God belongs to all men, in practice much of the exclusiveness lingers still. Individual men rise to a pure and consistent monotheism, endeavouring to judge all men by the same spiritual standards. But in churches and nations the old tribalism is hard to conquer ; it maintains itself under the noble names of patriotism and loyalty. It is not easy to maintain a high standard in the midst of conflicting claims.

The danger was of taking the promise to mean simply that the heathen may have the high privilege of seeing the wonderful restoration and the great things that Jehovah has done for Zion, and may be allowed to pay homage to heaven's favourites and lick the dust under their feet. That dream, when carried to a fanatical extreme, instead of showing the sweetness of religion, shows that religious privilege often leads to the most pretentious arrogance. A nobler type of thought, springing from the same root, is the representation that in Jerusalem the reign of righteousness, the rule of the living God shall be so clearly seen that men and women of other nations, who are hungering for the light, shall come and own the attractive sway of the world's noblest faith. This is a great claim indeed, but one that is justified by the facts of history and

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that has a permanent element in it, for it reminds us that religion must have an attractive nature as well as an aggressive organisation. Through all these stages the life and thought of Israel passes ; first, the exclusive claim to worship Jehovah and belong to Him, then the call to be a type and embodiment of the truly covenanted nation, and finally the hope of being the means of carrying the blessings of this covenant into the outside world. The full glory of this vision could only come, at first, to great men, men of special insight and large gifts ; and even in their case it must have a national colour and local setting. But we, who are still bound in so many prejudices of party, sect, and nation cannot afford to be too scornful in regard to the coarser forms of Israel's future hope. It is profitless now to denounce their narrowness ; it is the truest wisdom to learn the appropriate lessons in a spirit of humility. In whatever form the hope was cherished of being a light of the Gentiles it must have carried with it some sense of spiritual dignity and responsibility. Only in very few cases did it become quite selfish so as to contemplate the destruction of strangers with cool satisfaction. Religious fanaticism never could quite crush the touches of nature that make the whole world kin. The prophet who expresses so vividly God's pity over the great heathen city, Nineveh, had drunk deep into the noblest spirit of Hebrew religion and, in his own way, anticipated the tears shed over Jerusalem by the man of sorrows.

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These missionary and evangelical elements cannot find their full expression until, in later times, they are released from the fetters of "The Law," and even in Christian nations they have constantly to fight for their purity and freedom. But this does not lessen one whit our appreciation of the fact that it was a great day in the history of the world when a prophet could hold up before his people the idea of being "a light to the Gentiles" and could declare that the Divine purpose, their past history, and present experience all converged to this point. No newspapers chronicled the statement as "epoch-making"; it was not acclaimed by waiting thousands at a great conference; like most great things, it came quietly into the world and was appreciated only by a few insignificant people. The man who set it forth did not marvel at his own daring originality; he felt that he was simply trying to be loyal to the faith of his fathers. And yet this son of consolation, this herald of salvation, threw into the seed-field of a world's thought a great living truth whose lasting power and widespread sway he did not fully understand.

This is certainly a noble ambition—to be "a light to lighten the nations." Our Lord says to the men whose hearts He has touched, "Ye are the light of the world." That also seemed in the circumstances to be a bold word, an utterance of one who was carried away by the heat of His enthusiasm and the beauty of His message. Let even the sceptical look at it now in the light of

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nineteen centuries and they may see, if not its fulness of meaning, at least the undeniable fact that it was a prophecy that, in the course of history, has received a large measure of justification. When all the narrowness and bigotry of Christians and all the failures of the Church had been discounted there remained a light streaming from the Cross never quite quenched, a testimony never completely lost. Our Lord would be the first to acknowledge His debt to the past and to claim kinship with the great prophets. He exalted not the ritual law but the great law of self-sacrifice which had found a real, if imperfect expression in the lives of His heroic for-runners (Matt. ix. 13). These longings after universal service do not find clear expression and perfect fulfilment in Judaism, but after the painful lessons of the exile the consciousness of world-vocation survived, in spite of great difficulties, the feeling that a really great truth, a genuine revelation could not be limited by national boundaries but possessed an essential freedom of its own. Those sons of Israel who were true to the higher prophetic teaching did become a light to the world; and the Christian religion has come slowly to realise that the missionary spirit is not an external accomplishment, but the centre of its very life. It has taken centuries to bring these truths to their proper setting in the life of the world, and here we see them in germinal forms beginning to exert that leavening influence which is real even when silent and unseen. In the light of this later history we

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can accept the prophet's invitation and respond to his vision, with grateful gladness, joining with him in the joyful refrain :

Sing unto Jehovah a new song,
And His praise from the end of the earth. (xlii. 10.)

IV

The Servant as Teacher and Missionary

Behold my servant, whom I uphold ;
My chosen, in whom my soul delighteth ;
I have put my spirit upon him ;
He shall bring forth justice to the nations.

He shall not cry nor roar,
Nor cause his voice to be heard in the street,
The bruised reed he shall not break
And the dimly burning wick he shall not quench.

He shall not burn dimly, nor shall he be bruised,
He shall bring forth justice in truth,
Till he have set justice in the earth
And the coastland shall wait for his teaching.

(ISAIAH xlvi. 1-9.)

HERE we have a complete poem that can be separated from its context and which may be of later date than the surrounding sections. Our present concern, however, is with the ideal of service so nobly presented and not with the unsolved critical problem upon which competent scholars differ so widely. The ideal of teacher and missionary so clearly portrayed here has been in a measure fulfilled both in the nation and in

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its great men, while the Christian Church will ever look to her Lord as its perfect fulfilment.

In these three well-balanced stanzas we have a progressive statement which sets forth in clear outline the choice, equipment, spirit and mission of the servant. Jehovah speaks of the election of the servant and the gift of the spirit to him. His gentleness is described and in similar language his patient perseverance is expressed. He who does not "break the crushed reed," nor "quench the dimly burning wick" shall not find his force "dimmed" nor will his "spirit be crushed." He shall have success in the highest sphere, as he will establish religion in the earth, and the coastlands shall wait expectant for his teaching. To whatever period such a statement belongs it is one of the highest points of revelation reached in the Old Testament and has behind it many centuries of painful discipline and divine guidance.

I. THE CHOICE AND EQUIPMENT OF THE SERVANT. It is the voice of Israel's God which here calls attention to the servant's high vocation, and asks us to look upon a figure of more than mere local significance. What thoughts and expectations circled around the name "servant of Jehovah" in the popular mind, at that time, we cannot say precisely. But we see at once that this picture is full of rich instruction and inspiring suggestion. To see it clearly and meditate reverently upon its meaning must have a rich reward. Surely if one is set before us as a

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representative of God it is well that we should consider his character. Men have often come forth with strong claims as the special messengers of heaven, and, after a little temporary success, a flash of popularity, have been forgotten or despised because they did not meet the deepest needs of the longing soul. The rejection of the true servant is also a commonplace of history but, as we may see in the life of Jeremiah, the lowly faithful one finds true success in the hour of his deepest failure. Or as we read the truth in this short simple story *he who possesses the Divine call and equipment cannot fail completely.* This is the very heart of that great creed which made the ancient saints so strong; this firm belief that behind a human life there may stand the strength of the Divine will that cannot be thwarted in its redeeming purpose. The community could not have held together through such painful disappointments if this faith had not been kept alive. The great leaders could not have persevered in their hard tasks if they had not "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." We must live in the same faith, rest on the same power; but we live also by our communion with the great servants of the past, our vision of that "great cloud of witnesses" who cleared the path and prepared the way for us.

God has laid hold of the servant to draw him into the great work, to sustain and strengthen him all through its course. But the very essence of service is willingness; it is this that redeems it from drudgery and gives it a touch of true

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nobility. The point of this great mystery of freewill and fate, personal responsibility and divine sovereignty pierces to the very depth of the human soul in the moment of its great call. Isaiah calls, "Here am I, send me," under the influence of a compelling revelation. To Jeremiah shrinking from the fierce battle it is made known that only thus can he accomplish his true destiny, and Paul finds his greatest theme of rejoicing in the fact that he "was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." In a certain sense Providence overrules the lives of all; the lowliest servant must have the confidence that comes from this thought of being laid hold of by the eternal God. But this hope shines out most clearly in the struggles of those who have to meet sharp resistance and bitter misrepresentation; when they seem to be forsaken, God is their real unseen support, when the dark cloud passes they cry "Nevertheless I am still with thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 23). Here the fact of actual suffering and keen opposition is not yet set before us, but we are assured that the calm service of the teacher, the gentle perseverance, the unfailing sympathy, rest upon the reality of the divine strength and support. It is not a sudden flash of vision in one moment of high illumination or an inrush of energy for one tremendous battle; it is the strength for the long round of quiet hours and slow-moving days. This is a steady, constant life because there is always coming to it through secret sources that divine energy in which "we live and move and have our being."

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A more specific expression of this is that upon him "the spirit of Jehovah" has been freely poured as the positive equipment for his ministry. From this spirit, as we are often told in the Old Testament, come the gifts which fit the chosen men for their high tasks as prophetic leaders or kingly rulers. The insight, courage and fairness without which there is no true teaching or noble statesmanship are traced to the special working of this divine energy (Isaiah xi. 2). The remarkable point here is that it is associated with calm service and gentle methods. This shows that a high stage of religious reflection has been reached. In early days men were wont to regard the action of the spirit of Jehovah as producing mainly effects that were irregular or sudden in their appearance and intensity (Judges xiv. 8). Many of the prophets of these olden times were men of frenzy, manifesting their loyalty to Jehovah and their patriotic zeal in wild, startling fashion (I Sam. xi. 6; xvi. 14). They rendered service in keeping alive the fire of religious enthusiasm but they were sometimes rude and ill-balanced. We may judge their work in a sympathetic spirit without weak fastidiousness or cynical scepticism, while we admit that it had its imperfections. In our own time, when we are tempted to boast of our "rationalism" there are still many who limit too much the divine working to outbreaks of emotion and excitement of revivals. The great prophets were men of strong emotions, they had their times of ecstasy when the vision of Jehovah's majesty kindled secret rapture in their souls,

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but their message has a high intellectual quality and calls for thoughtful action. They were interested in civic and social life and desired to stimulate their hearers to a deeper sense of responsibility as citizens. They appeal to the whole man, not merely to feeling or religious passion. In later times there came men of an even more reflective type who pondered the great problems of the soul and of the world's life ; who sought to arrange in order and set forth with authority the great truths that had been gained. With some, such as the author of the Book of Job, thought attained a larger sweep and greater depth without losing in force and spontaneity. In these ways also the spirit of God was working so that even then there was a real appropriateness in the words "There are diversities of manifestation but the same spirit." We might well expect then that when the ideal servant is set forth as teacher and missionary, emphasis should be laid upon this great gift of the spirit. But we see also the great advance made in the conception of the close association of its activity with the mind of the inspired man. By the rich endowment of the spirit he becomes the representative of God ; the divine is seeking to express itself in human form. Without disparaging any of the great works of God we may say that the truth embodied in a consistent human life is the highest revelation. The thunders that peal from the burning mountain and the lightning that plays around its peaks cannot reach our hearts in the same way as these calmer manifestations of the

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spirit. The eternal spirit, the power that is not of ourselves and that yet creates the deeper self is now revealed in many ways, not bound to one ceremony or limited to one form ; and through this power the servant is led to deeper views of truth and a larger outlook of service.

II. THE SPIRIT OF THE SERVANT. The spirit of God is in him, let us see how it comes forth. It appears as kindness ; not a lazy indifference or contemptuous tolerance but real gentleness ; reminding one of the “fruits of the Spirit” as set forth by the great apostle of the Gentiles (Gal. v. 22). We are not told that the coming of the Spirit leads him with abrupt energy to buckle on his armour and slay the enemies of Israel, or that with fierce zeal he will doom the idolaters to death. Of such things we may read elsewhere and learn the appropriate lessons. Here, there is a real approach to the gentleness of the Christ : surely this is a rare gem in that ancient literature. When we remember the many sad experiences through which the Jews had to pass, crushed by powerful foes, taunted by unkindly neighbours, disappointed in their brightest hopes, doomed to shed their blood for their religion, we can understand how the bitter feelings against foreigners grew strong and how even men of kindly hearts could believe that a sensational judgment on the heathen was just and that their God would give it in due time. If the nation wished to share Israel’s great treasure and glorious heritage then let them come on their knees and bring their

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precious gifts and lick the dust in reverence to God and homage to His people (*Isaiah xlvi. 14*). We need not go far from our present passage to see these things; in a sense we may say it is natural, natural enough seeing that it has clung to the Church in all ages even when there was less excuse. It was not mere vindictiveness, there was in it a deep sense of outraged justice and a cry to God for help. Here, however, we are in different atmosphere. Just as another prophet could give the promise that Jehovah would wipe away the tears from off *all* faces (*Isaiah xxv. 8*), so our author knows that Israel has no monopoly of sorrow. Outside, as well as within her borders there are those who are symbolised by "the crushed reed" and "the dimly burning wick." What they need is not fierce denunciation or harsh dogmatism but gentle healing and helpful teaching. What a great thing it is, a difficult lesson to learn at first, to recognise that violence and strength are not the same, that the steady shining of the sun is more powerful than the earthquake or the volcanic outbursts of nature's pent-up forces.

In the ministry of our Lord we see this great truth in its supreme manifestation. He was no cloistered student or secluded thinker; He mingled in the busy throng, He lifted up His voice to preach the gospel to the poor, He uttered strong words of indignation against hypocrisy; but His career was free from vulgar sensationalism, its prevailing spirit was that of a gentleness, pity for the unfortunate, sympathy for the sorrowful.

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When our thoughts turn towards Him it is to remember not so much the cleansing of the temple and the denunciations of the Pharisees as the tears shed over the city and the picture of the prodigal's return.

In our lives also it is good to remember the glory of quiet service ; the work of men and women that is not organised, and that is unheralded, that is done by gentle words and unobtrusive deeds. There are men who have not appeared upon platforms or published books or had their deeds recorded, who have yet rendered faithful service to God and men, which defied all small measurements ; men who toiled in secret for some great truth and pressed it home with gentle persistency until by its clear shining it shamed the politicians into action and pointed the path for true statesmanship. We do not need maudlin sentiment or weak irresponsibility, but we ought to thank God for those who by the power of the Spirit are led to show breadth of sympathy, so breaking the barriers of race and class in the effort to prove that the phrase "one God and Father of us all" represents a real conviction.

III. THE MISSION OF THE SERVANT. He will bring forth religion or religious ordinances, and the coast lands shall wait in expectation for his instructions. It is clear that the scope of his activity is not limited to the Jews ; on the supposition that the servant is the community, we have the ideal of a Missionary Nation. As a

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person it would represent a Missionary Messiah but in either case the fact is clear that the religion of Israel is beginning to chafe against national barriers and sectarian restrictions ; it is beginning to feel the pulsing of a universal life ; long centuries have been spent in isolation and preparation until the call is now seen to be large and its meaning clear. Centuries must pass away before the world sees the full significance of the truth here stated. It is still a vision and an inspiration. Judaism tried to fulfil the dream by means of law which became ever harder and more complex. Mohammedanism sought to realise it by the power and pressure of the sword. Christianity has essayed the highest task in varied forms and with some true success. In all these cases there has been fierce earnestness, terrible persistence, heroic suffering, but often the light of love has been lacking and the figure of the gentle teacher has been obscured.

Let us look at this then as an expression of faith, as a light shining in a dark place long centuries ago. We shall see that in these days of suffering, the eternal God did not leave Himself without a witness. In our era of missionary machinery, it is important that we should go back to the original sources and find that the justification of all such effort is in the quality of the truth that has been revealed.

Note the significant phrase which forms the climax of this short poem : *The coastlands shall wait expectant for his teaching.* It may be doubted whether Israel's interest in the larger

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world reached such full expression in the dark days of the Exile ; and it has been maintained that the picture of a quiet teacher belonged to a later time. That discussion is important for the history of Hebrew religious thought ; for us now it is sufficient that before the Christian era the claim was made that the religion given to this small community is needed by the world. True, this gift is Israel's special possession and real glory, but not for herself alone was it given ; it is God's gift and is meant for mankind. Thus indirectly a claim is made of kinship with the outside world. This means that in human nature there is something deeper than racial divisions. The prophet, though he is a thinker presenting a great faith, may not be fully conscious of the far-reaching influence of these truths ; at any rate he does not work them into a system but gives them living form in the figure of the servant. He suggests that the possession of a noble religion implies the duty of spreading it. Our range of vision is larger, our treasures of truth richer, so there is still greater need of holding fast to this central principle. This must not be limited to what we call "theological doctrines" but to all real knowledge ; for the faith in one God makes all truth sacred. To say this is simply to express in our poor prose what is implied in this glowing, significant poetry.

The spirit of God has inspired in this man a great faith in the need and capacity of human nature ; he does not believe that men, even "heathen men," can live by bread alone or be

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content with earthly attractions. He thinks that they need the truth, that they can appreciate and appropriate it, and if they once see the quiet dignity and feel the gentle power of the servant they will stretch out eager hands for the bread of life. This is deeper and worthier than any claim to sectarian superiority ; there is a generous recognition of man's capacity and of the fact that the truth because it comes from God can have no small ends to serve, no narrow mission to fulfil. Men of all tribes long for it as the eye craves the light. This does not mean that all controversies can be avoided, or that the highest message meets with quick success, but that there is a vital relation between the soul of man and the truth that comes from heaven. The work of the true missionary thus rests on a solid foundation, or, to use a more appropriate figure, has its roots deep down in the common needs of men and the universal grace of God.

This being the prophet's conviction we need not wonder at the calm triumphant tone with which the poem closes. The servant of God cannot fail ; because of his loyalty to the truth he will achieve victory and complete his task. We may find elsewhere hints of opposition and martyrdom, but here the picture is compressed into a small space and we only hear the sublime assertion that there can be no doubt about the final victory. It is in this spirit that the world's greatest work has ever been done, that the noblest service has always been rendered. Noble men have looked to the end and have felt that the final triumph

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was certain simply because God rules the world. In that assurance individual servants have suffered and died, feeling that "the cause" was immortal and that their personal loss was a small incident in the age-long battle. Even the greatest Servant met what appeared to be final defeat when scornful men passed by the Cross with their cynical cry, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," but the promise still held good that "He shall not be crushed or burn dimly until He have set religion on earth." Many times the light has seemed to burn dimly and to be on the point of being quenched, but since the advent of the true Servant it has been proved that it can be rekindled at the Cross; the sign of defeat has become an eternal symbol of victory.

V

The One Word of Reproach, or The Limitations of the Servant

Who is blind but my servant ?
Or deaf as my messenger that I sent ?
Who is blind as he that is perfect,
And blind as Jehovah's servant,
Seeing many things, but thou observest not ;
Opening the ears, but he heareth not.

(ISAIAH xlii. 19, 20.)

THE remarkable thing about this great sermon, or series of discourses, comprised within these sixteen chapters is not only the consistent attempt to administer consolation and inspire faith but the prevailing tenderness of style. Even against enemies the prophet cannot be said to be fierce, and in his treatment of idolatry there is what we might call a kindly contempt for such human weakness. Some sentences of more than usual sharpness have been regarded, by several scholars, as later additions, and if that is so it only emphasises the gentle tone which dominates the whole message. The terrible rebukes and rude denunciations of earlier prophets are absent ; an effort is made to fix the attention not on man's fears, follies and failures but upon God's pardoning grace and

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redeeming power. In considering this we need to take into account the kindly disposition and the poetic, hopeful temperament of the man, as well as the fact that he probably dwelt in a comparatively calm, cloistered place, free from the stimulants and irritations of public life ; but the chief explanation is that the situation demanded a tender appeal, a call addressed in winning tones to the hearts of despairing men. Thus when we find anything that is in the tone of reproach, it is, as compared with the bitter rebukes of Jeremiah or the terrible indictments of Ezekiel, exceedingly mild. And, further, the word of mercy always keeps company with the word of warning.

“ But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob ;
But thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.
Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings ;
Neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.
I have not caused thee to serve with an offering,
Nor wearied thee with incense.”

“ Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money,
Neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices :
But thou hast made me to serve with thy sins,
Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.
I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine
own sake
And will not remember thy sins.” (xlivi. 22-25.)

This is a rare passage in a book whose ruling note is “ Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people,” and in it there is only sufficient shadow to set forth by contrast the light of divine mercy and

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the free, immortal character of divine love. If we wish for dark pictures of Israel's sin and punishment, we may seek and find them elsewhere ; here, we are in the sphere of grace ; we are reminded that the creative word is a word of mercy.

Moving in this atmosphere, there is one general reflection that is forced upon us, a thought applicable to all times and places, even this : what a great gift of nature and of grace is this power of poetry, this capacity of hope ! The days were dark for those captive, afflicted people, the outlook was quite gloomy for any national revival. To go back to Jerusalem, to begin everything afresh under the most distressing circumstances, this was prosaic in the extreme ; it was a continual struggle with the most stubborn facts. This prophet has lifted it into a golden, glorious light, regarding it as a new creation which transforms the desert and fills the barren land with beauty.

For Jehovah hath comforted Zion,
He hath comforted all her waste places.
And hath made her wilderness like Eden
And her desert like the garden of Jehovah ;
Joy and gladness shall be found therein,
Thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. (li. 3.)

There is a dazzling and triumphant faith in such passages that stands in striking contrast to the hard, prosiac facts. But before we dismiss them in contempt, as childish dreaming or vain illusion, we must remember two things that are absolutely certain ; first, that this inspiring preaching

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helped men to live through the cruel crisis, and, second, that the hopes have in the long run been fulfilled in a glorious fashion to which the most eloquent speech and most gorgeous imagery cannot do full justice. It is the men of unconquerable faith and undying hope who have saved for us the precious things of the past and prepared the way for us ; so that we, when overtaken by despondency, may still cherish a living confidence in God. Without this sanctified imagination, which in the days of desolation delights to paint the golden glories of the new world, how can we bear the present drudgery and disappointment ?

I. THE LIMITATIONS OF GOD'S SERVANT. There is some doubt about the original form of the word rendered, "the one that is perfect," "the surrendered one," or "the one that is at peace with me"; this much, however, is clear and is the point that concerns us now, namely, that the Israelites as the servants of Jehovah are gently reproached on account of blindness and deafness. Great things they have seen and wonderful things they have heard, but they have failed to grasp the full scope and significance of these things. This is true at all times of the real servants of God, and none are more willing to confess their blindness than those who have caught a glimpse of the vastness of the divine revelation. No doubt the preacher himself remembered times when he had only half perceived the meaning of the prophetic messages; he glories now in the larger

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light because it gives him a new power of gracious ministry. The Bible that they possessed was, as compared with ours, fragmentary and imperfect, but they had not exhausted its rich suggestions. He could appeal to them, in this respect, and say :

“Have ye not known, have ye not heard ?
Hath it not been told you from the beginning ?
Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth ?”

The noble tradition stretched far back into the past and was supported by an intelligent interpretation of nature and history. Israel’s God had shown Himself to be the ruler of the world and the guide of His people. Yet how few understood the significance of that sublime fact. It is a tragic thing that some of the worst failures of life are found in the most enlightened nations, gross impurity, dull scepticism and coarse superstition. The deepest shadow lies beside the most brilliant light. In the course of Israel’s history the difference between popular religion and prophetic teaching tends to become sharper as the revelation reaches its loftiest achievement.

II. GAIN AND LOSS. Surely it was a great gain to the world that “the remnant” survived, that they created forms which hedged them in and protected them and their religion from the fierce encroachments of the world. The nation was broken but the Church survived, and the book on which their best life was nourished became a precious possession for mankind. But we do well to remember the fiery trials involved in this

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changeful history. Two centuries before this the Northern Kingdom had been shattered ; many of its members were lost, in the sense of being absorbed by the peoples among which they were dispersed. The things of worth that they left behind have come to us in the literature that Judah has preserved. When the time came for Jerusalem to share the fate of Samaria, a clearer individuality and a more definite creed had been formed. The Babylonian conquerors could crush the nation and destroy the temple but *they could not kill the soul*. The resurrection from the dead prophesied by Ezekiel became a reality ; after such an experience the religion could not abide alone and become completely self-centred ; it took its place as one of the great world-forces. But many of its adherents had no vision of its deep significance and its great destiny. They clung with a faith that was remarkable for its tenacity even when it was limited in knowledge. Many also fell by the way, heartbroken, knowing only this, that the God of their fathers had forsaken them either because He lacked power to meet the emergency or because He no longer took an interest in their life. Their last word was :

My way is hid from Jehovah,
And my judgment is passed over from my God.

We can only think of them with sympathy and remember that in every great spiritual crisis, when the Church has been thrust out into a larger world to learn that God is greater than the creeds, the like experience has been common ; at such

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times men must lose faith altogether, fall back with bitter determination on the old forms, or pass into a larger world of thought where God is seen to be the explanation of all life.

III. THINGS HARD TO LEARN. Those who came in a measure victorious through the struggle found that the new lessons were not easy to learn. They had seen and heard many glorious things ; the storied past held for them many treasures of knowledge : the songs of Zion possessed real life, if they died on their lips it was only to sink deeper into their hearts. They were proud of their history and felt that the covenant with their God could not be vain and meaningless. But, being men of faith, they could not make their permanent abode in the past ; they must face the future, and life was growing ever more complex.

It was not easy to learn all that was involved in the thought that just because their God was so great He could not be content simply to protect a tribe or nation and receive its sacrifices. To give, in a superficial way, peace and prosperity was not a full statement of His programme. He will create a righteous nation and give to believers an ever larger vision of His purity ; that was something different and higher. What this meant could be learned only in the hour of disappointment. They "trusted that He would have redeemed Israel," and this was what happened ; a temple in ruins, a people in exile. The world's cruel question, "Where is now thy

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God?" struck deep into their souls. This was to them a sacred mystery, and with all our clever speculations we are sometimes dumb before the fact that the noblest things come to us through pain. They in that dark hour began to learn that man does not live by bread alone, that the sacrifices of God are a broken heart and a contrite spirit, that God Himself, and not merely His gifts, must be the portion of the loyal worshipper.

It was difficult for them to grasp the fact that "election" is to service, in the largest sense, not merely to privilege. They knew that they must render service to their God; that was a simple truth known through many generations. They were in grim earnest in such service, they were prepared to pay a great price, to suffer pain, to endure hardships, to submit to severe discipline. All that was clearly of the very nature of religion, which is no child's play but a man's tribute to the eternal king. But to learn that the real service is goodness which is shown not in ritual cleanliness and correctness, but in honesty, kindness and thoughtfulness, that, while it seems so commonplace and sounds so easy, is in the real sense "the strenuous life." And when the goodness meant a kindly feeling towards "the foreigner," there was real trouble, because, in those days, there was danger in a too close contact and communion with strangers. And yet if, as the prophets taught, Jehovah is indeed the God of the world, if Nebuchadrezzar was His instrument and Cyrus His anointed, could there be after all such a deep

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division between Jew and Gentile ? Here is a problem calling for much thought and not to be easily solved. Jonah will wait impatiently for the destruction of a great city, but Jehovah has pity upon the multitude of ignorant men and innocent children.

Hard, then, it is for men to learn, that because their God is so great they must lose Him—to this extent, that they can no longer monopolise Him. If He had been a small tribal God they could have kept Him : they would have been quite welcome to keep Him. But, in that case, their religion would have had slight significance for the world ; they would have left no more trace on history than Edom or Moab. The prophet himself cannot see the full meaning of this history, as we see it now ; that was impossible ; it would be quite unreasonable to expect it ; but he has a larger horizon than most of his fellow-Israelites ; he can see clearly that many of their views are narrow and limited. He thinks that if they will look intelligently into the past and gaze reverently up into the heavens they will have a wonderful light thrown upon their small life. Oh ! if we would only take our petty prejudice, our narrow sectarianism out into the great spaces of history and nature ; though these things are so dear to us, and appear to be of the essence of our life, we might see that they are coming to be out of date, that in the onward march of the greatest of all movements, things have become a hindrance that were once a help. Pious patriots can find comfort and strength in these words :

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“ For the mountains shall depart,
And the hills be removed :
But my kindness shall not depart from thee,
Neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed,
Saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee.” (liv. 10.)

But the prophet sees that it is failure to rest there, in thankful ease and spiritual pride. Unless the whole movement of history is to lose its purpose, the sorrowful nation must learn to look above and beyond itself and so catch the word that has larger suggestion and more bracing influence.

I will also set thee for a light to the Gentiles,
That thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

VI

The Nation as the Servant

Yet now hear, O Jacob, my servant ;
And Israel whom I have chosen ;
Thus saith Jehovah that made thee,
And formed thee from the womb, which will help thee ;
Fear not, O Jacob, my servant ;
And thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen,
For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty,
And floods upon the dry ground ;
I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed,
And my blessing upon thine offspring.

(ISAIAH xliv. 1-3).

For Jacob my servant's sake and Israel mine elect,
I have called thee by thy name :
I have surnamed thee,
Thou hast not known me,
I am Jehovah and there is none else,
There is no God beside me.
I girded thee, though thou hast not known me,
That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the
west,
That there is none beside me. (ISAIAH xlvi. 4-6.)

I. THE PROPHET'S GREAT CLAIM. There is one thing quite clear in the study of this poem, namely, that the thought of *Israel* as the servant of God is boldly stated and nobly worked out ; this thought is not new, in fact it must have

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existed as long as there was any real relation between Jehovah and Israel, but it receives here a new quality. The earlier prophets had criticised the kind of service that was offered to their God, and by their preaching a nobler idea of responsibility had been brought to bear upon religious worship and social conduct. The message here implies the earlier teaching, but it takes its peculiar tone from the fact that it is a word of comfort spoken to an afflicted people and in the face of an hostile world.

It is clear also that this is a great word of faith ; the fact that it was spoken in an hour of deep sorrow shows that the reliance is on spiritual forces. All through the prophecy the stress is laid not upon what man can do by personal cleverness or skilful social co-operation but on the power of God to create a new spirit in the nation and to remove the frowning obstacles that stand in the way of deliverance. The proud opponent might call this religious bigotry, and the cynical unbeliever brand it as impudent arrogance. But in whatever way it affects different minds there is surely something sublime in the fact that the representative of a scattered and oppressed people can calmly declare that the brilliant empires of the world will crumble to pieces but the word of his God abides for ever. The intellectual power and the spiritual beauty of the message redeem it from vulgar fanaticism. Such a claim cannot rest on mere assertion ; it must meet the storms of life and take its place at the bar of history.

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It must be admitted by all who are not blinded by prejudice or carried away by anti-Semitic fury that in the main the claim has been fulfilled, that history is an illustration and a justification of the essential elements of prophecy. Judaism in its later days did not always rise to the height of this great argument, but it did a great work in preserving for us such precious things from the past and preparing the way of the Lord. It proved to be a longer, more toilsome and prosaic task than the prophet had dreamed of, but men were found who could learn to labour and to wait, and the long day was not without its brilliant heroic hours. The prophets who taught that splendour of ritual and abundance of sacrifices is not sufficient for the true God, had not laboured in vain. They builded both better and larger than they knew, and out of their stern efforts there came a contribution to the life of humanity which we learn to value more highly as we enter more deeply into the meaning of history.

II. AN INTELLIGENT USE OF HISTORY. To grasp the full significance of the prophet's message we must read it both in the light of the great sorrow out of which it sprang and of the later history. The word that gives such noble inspiration and finds such rich fulfilment is rooted in the past. In these and in other passages dealing with the same theme the election upon which the life and service of the nation rests is not a new thing ; it is a divine purpose that gives its promise of future blessing by the way in which

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it has grasped the past. At this period both in Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah we meet a larger interpretation of the meaning of history. Certainly all through the past men have been able to speak in living faith of "the God of our fathers." The noble traditions of good men were handed down from one generation to another as the gift of God. In this prophecy we are approaching a more reflective period, when history can be viewed as a continuous pathway along which the presence of the Lord can be discerned moving with unerring wisdom and irresistible power towards His chosen purpose. The strength of this teaching and its suggestiveness for us is that it shows us a wise use of the past. Men are prone to live upon the past, and the time came when Jews believed that all the law of God had been revealed. There could then only be mechanical comment and quibbling explanation. That sort of belief tended to crush spontaneous, exuberant life ; it killed the prophetic spirit. No such dead creed do we find here ; the very essence of the message is that the programme of Providence is not played out ; but there are wonders in store. The barrenness and hardness of life are to be stirred by a new manifestation of creative energy and a new outpouring of the divine spirit.

I will pour water upon him that is thirsty
I will pour my spirit upon thy seed. (xliv. 3.)

The guarantee of the new life is the faithfulness of God who has manifested Himself in the past,

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giving to the nation something that is worth preserving and that cannot be lost. He who made Abraham into a great people can give a new destiny and a still larger life to a penitent, broken-hearted nation. The bold, poetic imagery that is used, while it suggests supernatural splendour and gives a heavenly glory to Jerusalem, must not be separated from the spiritual content of the message. The glory springs from the presence of God and that presence has to be interpreted in the light of the great thoughts concerning history and human life that are here unfolded. This is a God who guides the stars in the heavens, and leads His people through their wilderness, who creates constantly a new heaven and a new earth, who sends forth a living word that acts, with unfailing energy, on the lives of men and on the destiny of nations. The Church and the world, the past and present, life and death are all within the scope of His loving purpose.

There is not only a message for one age ; in its spirit it is for all time. We still feel and understand the power of early memories and the sacredness of local associations, but we do not appreciate fully the closeness with which in those days God was linked to the native land and religion rooted in the soil. Hence the piercing sharpness, the painful pathos of the cry, "How can we sing Jehovah's song in a foreign land ?" is apt to escape us. Our prophet does not free religion from the land ; he promises that the old land shall be resplendent with new beauty and the majesty of the divine presence shall be

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revealed there in surpassing splendour. But his promise implies a religion that is not merely local ; if the glory is so great it must crave a larger ministry, and radiate into ever wider circles. The psalmist tells of an hour of silence when the songs of Zion fell back into the heart and could not find expression because it was a time for tears and not for song. In that hour the song was tested ; if it had belonged only to one time and to Palestine it might have died ; but it proved to be of God and Eternity. It passed through silence to a larger life ; the silence was not of death ; it was the darkness before a new dawn. It was one of the stages in the passage of a great religion from national limitations to the universal spirit. For we need to remember that in dealing with spiritual things we cannot draw hard and fast lines ; we must be allowed to say that while Judaism never lost completely its national character, in many of its representatives and in much of its literature it did really attain to a wide unsectarian outlook. On the other hand in Christianity with all its freedom from nationalism and its intense missionary zeal there are still many forms of tribalism ; many attempts to confuse the mere mechanism of the Church with the inward life of religion. It may help to quicken our faith and broaden our thought to remember how much we owe to the past ; and to acknowledge with gratitude that Israel has been in an important sense the servant of God to us. When these disappointed patriots and suffering saints ask that great question, " How

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can we sing Jehovah's song in a foreign land ? " it was of themselves they were thinking, they did not then dream of an abiding influence in remote lands and distant isles.

III. THE VARIED FORMS OF SERVICE. The Jew as a trader is often made the subject of bitter scorn and cynical contempt. Men despise the poor pedlar and envy the millionaire banker. The origin of this feeling is mixed in its character, springing partly from racial hatred and partly from the contempt for commerce that used to be cherished by the aristocrat and the savage. The Jew has had his weaknesses but he cannot be said to monopolise the baser features of trade ; cheating in varied forms is not unknown among Christians. Looked at in the light of history the Jew is deserving of our sympathy in this regard. He was forced into this business of trading when he was scattered among the nations and in many cases not allowed to possess himself of the soil. Though, like other people, he had in him the keenness of bargaining and the power to take care of oneself, which is the condition of successful business, he was originally a peasant and longed to sit in peace under his own vine and fig-tree. His race has not lost this home-sickness, this hunger for the soil ; the Zionism of our day is a manifestation of it.

It was not altogether from choice that the energies of the Jew were given so exclusively to trade ; and we make bold to say that even here he has been in some measure a servant of the Lord.

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We can see now that commerce is not contemptible except as it is made so by selfishness and dishonesty. It is the way by which the different nations minister to each other's needs and distribute the good gifts of God. It provokes sharp rivalries but it also creates bonds of mutual interest which make for peace and show the folly of war. We cannot anywhere go back to "the simple life;" this fine network of finance which joins the nations into one, needs to be ruled by the Christian spirit. Instead of denouncing Jews it would be better to show the world of business it can be made a sphere of divine service. In that spirit we shall be ready to admit that the Jew by the mere effort to keep himself alive served humanity and to that extent served his God. But we can now see that it was for us also that the question had to be faced and solved. The time had not yet come when the lofty truth could be clearly proclaimed that God is Spirit and that the quarrels of rival sanctuaries are petty, trifling things (John iv. 21). But here we have a part of the preparation for that time.

The important truth that the supreme worship is not the material sacrifice, but the contrite heart, while in a line with the teaching of the great prophets was only fully learned through sorrow even by the noblest men. That which makes the Old Testament such a powerful book with ordinary people is the fact that there is so little theology in it, in the formal sense of that word, that its great truths are seen to grow out of the experiences of struggling men; and these

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experiences are similar in kind to those which we have all to face. Men away from home, cast among strangers, deprived of early associations and local traditions, either break down altogether or they gain a firmer hold of God and the invisible kingdom. Many failed in those days, giving way to scepticism or superstition; but those who stood fast not only saved their own lives, standing in the main line of this great upward movement, they served humanity in saving their own personal and national life. The nation that has no history may be happy in the superficial, comfortable sense, but such a nation does not give much to the life of the world. The nations that have served humanity have a startling story of heroic toil and tragic suffering. Israel's story is one that is stained on almost every page with blood and tears. Even if much of this was due to obstinate pride and fierce bigotry there is a residue that is sacrificial in its character that was endured in the effort to preserve these things which the world will not willingly let die.

The Jew was thinking only or mainly of himself and of his children when he gathered together his sacred books and gave new energy to the study of literature. Before this great sorrow of the Exile many of the noblest things in our Old Testament were written; but at this time, when cut off from temple services and national festivals, the Jews began to realise more fully the importance of the book. They had learned, in their own way, the great lesson that man cannot live by bread alone. They must live, and so must

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toil and trade for bare existence, but that could not satisfy the deeper cravings. The Sabbath, the meeting for prayer and study of Scripture gained a new significance. The collecting and arranging of the sacred books, the translation of these into foreign tongues, the systematic study of the Scribe and the regular teaching of children ; these things did not assume all at once their present form. But there is no doubt that these activities received a mighty impulse in those days of darkness and separation when the temple had been burned and the land devastated. No one can now with reason deny that the Jew in that very act of serving his God by gathering together the sacred oracles did also render an invaluable service to mankind. In the earliest days the burning words of prophecy and the songs of Zion were felt, by outsiders, to have a special spiritual quality (Acts xvii. 12). Here was a message from the God of righteousness, here was the voice of humanity crying out of the depths of sorrow and making its appeal to heaven. All through the ages the power and influence of this great literature has increased ; it has called forth the admiration of scholars and the devotion of the simple souls. God surely poured out His spirit upon those bygone generations with living power, since they have given to the world this book. If they came to worship the book in a mechanical fashion, they simply fell into a danger that besets us all. There is danger in the highest, holiest things ; the book may be used to crush rather than to nourish and stimulate the soul. That danger

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is common to all times and places ; the service that the Jew rendered to us was that through fierce conflicts where his national life might have been lost and his religious worship corrupted, he came forth strong on account of the inspiration received from the book, and in gratitude he saved for himself and for us this noble collection of picturesque narratives, fiery sermons, homely proverbs, and inspiring poetry.

This service is further seen in the preparation for missionary work in the widest sense, by the scattering of the Jews, and the diffusion of their religion. This Book of Consolation breathes something of this Missionary Spirit, even if we cannot take that phrase in its fully developed modern sense. We confine the word mainly to the clear recognition of the command, " Go ye into all the world," and to the formal organisation for carrying forward the same. The world had not then reached that definite point. One of the great ideas was that the glory of Jehovah would be so splendidly revealed on Mount Zion that all nations would flow thither to receive instruction and guidance (*Isaiah ii. 2-4*).

A noble conception ; religion, the true religion, must have an attractiveness by its divinity, by its inherent nobility and beauty. The Jewish nation was missionary in the sense that it had received from God truths so great that neither the land nor the nation could monopolise them. These thoughts of the attraction of Jerusalem were fulfilled in a literal sense, for pilgrimages to that shrine have never ceased.

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But these are not the real fulfilments of prophecy, which are to be sought rather in the dynamic power of truth which bursts all local barriers and refuses to stay where it is born because it belongs to all mankind. The programme of pious patriots was that all men should come to Jerusalem to find the living truth. But God's programme was different; it was to fling the Jew out into a hostile world that in contact and conflict with other religions he might learn the deeper meaning of his own faith and its power to speak to many hearts in other tongues. We do well, however, to remember that the feature upon which the prophet insisted so strongly, the power of a true religion and a real revelation of God to attract hungry hearts and seeking souls, is an essential and permanent part of the missionary idea. The success of the formal organisation and the direct missionary propaganda must be hindered or helped by the character of our national life and citizenship. If we would help other nations we must learn to solve our own problems in a Christian spirit. In spite of the dark strains in the history of its people and the repeated tragedies of its own life, Jerusalem has gained an everlasting name and become a symbol and synonym of the city of God, because it was the centre of a life that was rich in spiritual significance. Prophets were slain there, even the highest; but, strange as it may seem, that has ever been the pathway to larger service.

At the time when the Christ was manifested Judaism had taken its place as one of the great

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religious forces of the world ; it had fought its battle against Greek culture and Greek barbarism ; it had found its way into many cities of the Roman Empire. It could no longer be despised or ignored. Here was a strange people, on the surface arrogant and exclusive, gaining in many quarters the reputation of being at enmity with all mankind ; studying zealously its own history and clinging tenaciously to its own peculiar law, yet possessing a treasure which could not be completely monopolised. Strong men and noble women of many lands were indeed drawn to these synagogues and discerned a divine treasure in the rude earthen vessel. Superficially considered we have here a crowd of stupid pedants or wild fanatics, of cunning priests, and enthusiastic dreamers ; but if we are willing to look into the heart of the matter, to lay aside *our* national pride and acknowledge *our* just obligations, we may be constrained to admit that in the seeming confusion there is a real revelation and that here also is the Servant of the Lord.

VII

The Secret Preparation for Public Service

Listen, O isles, unto me
And hearken, ye people, from far ;
Jehovah hath called me from the womb ;
From the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name.
And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword :
In the shadow of His hand hath He hid me,
And made me a polished shaft ;
In His quiver hath He hid me ;
And said unto me,
Thou art my servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.
Then I said, I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain ;
Yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah, and my work with my God.
And now saith Jehovah
That formed me from the womb to be His servant
To bring Jacob again to Him
Though Israel be not gathered,
Yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah
And my God shall be my strength.
And He said, it is a light thing
That thou shouldest be my servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved of Israel :
I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles
That thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

(ISAIAH xl ix. 1-6.)

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I. THE SECRET PREPARATION. The servant of Jehovah is here introduced as speaking, in his own person, concerning his secret preparation and public service. This passage is a complete poem in which the theme is announced at the beginning, and then after an appropriate exposition, stated more clearly at the close. At once we learn that this is a matter of more than national significance :

Listen, O isles, unto me,
And hearken, ye peoples, from afar :

The servant looks beyond the narrow boundaries of his own people into the surrounding world. At the close we have the complete explanation and justification of this attitude in the words of Israel's God :

I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles
That thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

There can be no doubt about the missionary character of the call ; Israel is coming to the consciousness of the overflowing largeness of its religion. In the very hour of sorrow when they learn to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land, the men of prophetic spirit learn also that *the song is of more than local significance* ; in it there is something not only for themselves, but also for the foreigner whose land had seemed to be quite profane and godless. This is the clear trend of teaching in the poem, though here, as elsewhere, there are doubts as to the precise interpretation of particular phrases. The recurring question as to the personal or national application of the servant

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idea still faces us. If the word "Israel" is an original part of the text, the question is settled in this particular case, and we have to take the statement at the close of the passage as meaning that it is too light a thing for Jehovah simply to restore Israel. He will also set the restored Israel as a light for the Gentiles. We cannot deny that the word "Israel" may have been added here as is the case in the Greek version of some other passages ; and we must admit that the speaker has the appearance of an individual, or in other words, that the personification is very strong. It is evident that the application of the servant idea to Israel, even where the national name is not mentioned, comes to us from very ancient times. The extent of personification in poetry, and especially Hebrew poetry, is very wide ; a fact which needs to be remembered in this connection. So that this discussion as to whether in particular texts we have to do with the nation or one of its noblest members cannot be settled once for all. These discussions are not profitless ; those who consider them carefully gain thereby a fuller knowledge of the content and structure of particular passages. But in a popular exposition they are not in place, and instead of pursuing them we have to call attention to the fact that both points of view have much in common. With us, for a time, the personal life was largely separated from that of the community ; we regarded the nation too much as a collection of separate units, instead of as members of a living body. The result was that, in many cases, the

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emphasis was laid upon the future reward rather than on the present service. When religion came to be *the saving of the soul*, in a somewhat narrow sense, there was sure to be a strong reaction and a demand that it should be viewed as the *saving of society*. That takes us back to the ancient prophetic teaching, but surely in the long centuries between then and now we have learned something, and the new "socialism" must beware of losing the truth that "*the soul is a reality*." The community cannot become a mere machine; it is a complex organisation of living persons. We do well, then, to remember that great truths, which we apply naturally to the personal life, were first revealed in their application to society. The prophetic writers did not deal with a man as a separate being who could "do what he liked with his own"; they always viewed him as a citizen and in relation to his social obligations.

In later times the individual life became more prominent, religion became something deeper than tribal custom; but a man only rose to true greatness as he embodied in his life the great ideas of honour and justice that had been preached to the nation. In one sense you may say that it is impossible for a nation as such to be a missionary; the real missionaries are those citizens who embody in their private life and public service the noblest spirit of the nation. And yet we long for the time when a nation shall be so truly Christian in its life that the very fact of its existence in the world will be a missionary influence and a testimony to the power of God. Here already we have

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the beginning of that hope ; it is recognised that to gather the scattered Israelites and form them anew into a living nation is a great work, worthy of God's redemptive power, but that it is not the end ; there is something higher, namely, to set this restored nation as a light of the world. This comes as a revelation from Jehovah ; it rests upon the decrees of God. The servant recognises the revelation and sees the glory of the call, but there comes the breath of doubt, the suggestion of despondency and failure. This, however, is but a passing cloud, it is swept away by the stronger light in which the great commission is set. The possibility of defeat must be faced, in order that, in view of the divine purpose, its impossibility may be grasped. When this suggestion comes to the mind it is banished, not by the idea that this is an easy task quite within the compass of the servant's powers, but rather by the presentation of the infinite largeness of the work, the comprehensiveness and catholicity of the movement that is to spring out of it.

II. THE ELECTION AND THE CALL. The basis of this preparation is in the divine election. This is a thought that runs through all these discourses : those who do great things for the nation and for humanity have been chosen by God for this service, and have come to their work as the result of a long, silent preparation. Here the emphasis is laid upon the secret consecration and spiritual equipment of the servant for his great task :

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In the shadow of his hand hath He hid me,
And made me a polished shaft ;
In his quiver hath He hid me ;
And said unto me
Thou art my servant, O Israel. (xlix. 2.)

Surely this is one of the deepest truths concerning God's dealings with both the individual soul and the community. Whenever the conscious call may come it is not a new or disconnected thing. It implies a choice and preparation that goes far back into the past. The statement that the Christ came "in the fulness of time" has in the light of this truth a deep significance. We think that we have found something new and startling when we say that a man's education should begin before he is born. This truth receives illustration from recent research, but in simpler forms it played a great part in the past (Judges xiii. 4). It is implied in the thought of election and in the glorification of the men of earlier days. The men who were most original were precisely the men who claimed the closest kinship with the heroes of the olden time. When the man chosen for a great task hears the divine call, and comes under its authoritative spiritual pressure, a stream of new light is poured upon his past experience giving it a larger meaning. He sees the significance of many things that were formerly unsolved problems. The purpose of the hard discipline and severe conflict becomes clear ; "the call" is a spiritual impulse that relates the personal life to its appropriate sphere of service.

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This is true also of the nation ; especially true is it of this people Israel. At the first their relation to the surrounding nations stood upon the common plane ; all were neighbours, possibly enemies or friends. The religious life of such peoples was not a special concern to Israel ; it was, of course, to be avoided as something foreign, it might become a temptation and a snare. These Israelites must first solve the problem of making a living for themselves, and finding a place in the world, and what is more, of attaining a national character. This was a long, toilsome task, under the guidance of God-sent messengers. In the meantime the mass of the people stayed on a low plane of religious thought and the contrast between popular superstition and prophetic teaching grew deeper. It was in the hour of failure, the time of sorrowful exile, that the meaning of the past began to dawn more fully upon the people as a whole. The history of the nation, its disappointments as well as its successes, began to acquire new meaning. Even those who took the most despondent view and regarded the past as a black story of rebellion against Jehovah and apostacy from the true faith were compelled to see in it a preparation for something nobler. One thing, however, is quite clear to us, viz., that no nation can have any great influence in the world unless it has distinctive character, and that such character is formed only through centuries of painful discipline. When Israel came, in later days, to face "the Greek peril," the subtle influence of noble philosophy

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and frivolous fashions, there was a life based strongly on the past and sufficiently marked in its individuality to come out of the struggle victorious both in the physical and spiritual sense. When the last great national crisis came, Jerusalem could be destroyed, but Judaism could not be crushed. When men come to see that they have a divine gift for which they must fight and for which, if need be, they must die, that gift has already been worked into the fibre of their being by the long secret processes of providential discipline.

The same truth applies, on a smaller scale, to the lives of men. Even the Son of God spends long years in quiet thought, in silent preparation for His strenuous life-work. There is always in His speech a reserve of power, a sense of eternity behind His life. He is in no haste to complete an organisation and see it working with mechanical accuracy. But when He has departed a great light radiates from His Cross and men see that a silent preparation has been made for greater things.

III. THE TEMPORARY DESPONDENCY OF THE SERVANT.

Then I said, I have laboured in vain,
I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain ;
Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my
God.

There is no prolonged struggle, no intense agony, such as we find in chapters fifty and

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fifty-three ; this is a mere suggestion of the coming tragedy ; it is just the first shadow that arises in the face of a great commission. Isaiah, a man of firm temper and stern resolve, looks full into the face of his painful duty, and cries, " Lord, how long ? " Jeremiah with his gentle nature shrinks from the sharp demands and must be reminded that for a faithful soul there is no escape from destiny.

Few of us escape this sense of contradiction between *the secret meaning and the actual facts of life*. It is just when we discover what great possibilities there are in our life that we are oppressed by the feeling of its emptiness and futility. God says, " Thou art my servant " ; man cries, " My life is an utter failure." Here, as usual, when facing the facts of life, we meet with paradox or apparent contradiction. The great thing was not done in a light spirit of jaunty self-confidence ; the highest tasks are achieved by the men who feel their weakness most keenly ; and when the despondency comes it is not cured by whittling down the work in proportion to human strength, but by setting the vocation in a larger light and magnifying the power of God. Just because of this we may say that the man who has never passed through the vale of despondency and felt the loneliness, littleness, and uselessness of his own life has never seen the full vision of what, in God's purpose, is possible for him. A man comes to this hour of trial, the shadow falls across his life, the chill sense of fear and despair creeps into his soul ; he says, " This

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whole thing is futile ; I was under the illusion that I was of some importance, that I was doing something that even other men saw to be the meaning and glory of my life, but now I see that it is little that any mortal can accomplish and that my pretensions of serving the world and working out a fine career are contemptible." Just then we need a good shaking that will lead us to see the impertinence of bringing our small petulance into this great sphere. But the mighty God is gentle ; He expostulates with a peevish prophet, "Doest thou well to be angry ?" (Jonah iv. 9). To the servant He gives the inspiration of a nobler vision for he had not lost hold of the truth that *the final appeal is to the eternal God*. The reward of true service cannot be in any form of payment, it cannot be completely in the praises of the world or the appreciation of competent human judges. There are times when all these fail us, and we are cruelly disappointed ; then we have to remember that the reward is in the service itself, because it is the God-given task that best expresses our own true life. We can face much opposition and persecution if we can say :

Yet surely my judgment is with Jehovah
And my recompense with my God.

IV. JEHOVAH'S ANSWER TO THE SERVANT'S DEPRESSION. The despondency is disregarded, but the faith is recognised ; God gives His reply to our strength as it struggles to conquer its weakness. The words of the servant have something

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in them of the spirit of the man who said, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." When a believer cries, "Surely in spite of my feeble, vain efforts my reward is with God," he is on the way to a richer revelation. There is a greater task to be accomplished than even the boldest had dreamed of ; it is a greater thing than the restoration of Israel to service. When this prophet, the messenger of comfort, spoke of "redemption," the first meaning attached to that noble word was that Israel, as a sign of the divine forgiveness, was to be vindicated in the sight of a hostile world by a full restoration of ancient privileges and the gift of even more splendid blessings. But there is, here and there, a breaking through of the important truth that such a sphere of beneficent activity, noble as it is, cannot confine and consume the energies of the eternal God. Alongside of the promise, "Israel shall be saved by Jehovah with an everlasting salvation ; ye shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end" (xlv. 17), we must place the more comprehensive appeal : "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else."

These great promises become more specific in the claim that it is through Israel that salvation is sent to the world. On the surface this seems to be a preposterous claim to make on behalf of a small scattered community that, at its best, is a poor figure, from the point of view of worldly wealth and scientific culture. At that time it would spring only from a great faith in

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God and a proud consciousness that He had already given a precious heritage. Some of the Jews were apt to conceive of the reward in a worldly, materialistic form ; they were to be priests and princes by the divine favour and the reluctant recollection of the heathen. In this, like some "princes" of the Christian Church, they lost the simplicity and spirituality of the faith. But the most ignorant and fanatical knew quite well that their glory could not be the product of their own strength and skill ; it was after all in the new law that they gloried as the highest gift of God. The promise to the nation and the Christ is well balanced,

A light for revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Thy people Israel.

This is not mere poetic parallelism ; there is a deep spiritual connection. The real glory of Israel is in being the mediator of the revelation which sheds light upon man's pathway, showing the way to the throne of the living God.

The prophetic writer did not possess the knowledge of the qualities and activities of light such as the latest research has given to our generation, but he regarded it as one of the noblest results of creative energy and found in it an appropriate symbol of salvation. He must have known that it was at the same time one of the gentlest forces in the world. Others thought that Jehovah must reveal Himself to foreigners in the violence of the storm or the fierce fury of war ; here he reaches a higher plane, showing us the

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manifestation of God as a light that has come into human life and that by its very nature passed beyond local boundaries. He cannot remain a tribal God, the revelation of Himself to this one nation cannot be a final thing. Election as an arbitrary act of favouritism is now left behind ; *the choice is not merely to superior position, but also to larger usefulness.* When we speak of such teaching as a theology, we mean that it is drawn from the meditation upon what God is in Himself. Any narrow sectarian thing is too small for such a God. This is the God of the whole world, our little systems of thought cannot do justice to the infinite love that He bears towards His creatures. Certainly no Jewish system of law or theology ever expressed in its fulness the universal range of the divine purpose. But while that is true, we venture to affirm that the story of His dealings with mankind, as written in this wonderful book, has been a light to many generations. The burning words of the great prophet directed against corruption and oppression are still a mighty force in the battle for truth and freedom. The prayers of Israel's saints and the songs of Zion have often been a light and joy to sorrowing souls. This precious heritage has entered into the life of humanity, and more and more the nations of the world will learn that their privileges, while they are a legitimate ground for gratitude and pride, are held in trust for humanity.

VIII

The Servant as Disciple and Martyr

The Lord Jehovah has given me the disciples' tongue
To know how to sustain the weary with words,
Early in the morning He wakeneth mine ear, to hear as the
disciples,
And I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward ;
I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that
plucked off the hair ;
I hid not my face from shame and spitting,
For the Lord Jehovah will help me ; therefore have I not been
confounded,
Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall
not be ashamed.
He is near that justifieth me ; who will contend with me ;
let us stand together ;
Who is mine adversary ? Let him come near to me.
Behold the Lord Jehovah will help me ; who is he that shall
condemn me ?
They shall all wax old as a garment ; the moth shall eat them
up. (ISAIAH 1. 4-9.)

I. CONTEMPLATION AND CONFLICT. In this passage we have a separate poem which stands out boldly from its context, and gives a striking picture of the *Servant* as one who exercises a gentle ministry and meets with fierce opposition. In the passage immediately preceding, Jehovah, the

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God of Israel, is the speaker, and has just given a vivid representation of His own power, closing with the words, "I clothe the heavens with blackness and I make sackcloth their covering." Then a new speaker comes before us, somewhat abruptly, giving us a brief but vivid description of his own life, its inward source of strength and inspiration, its outward scene of unceasing struggle. In one place there is uncertainty as to the text, but on the whole it is well preserved ; the main outlines of the servant's character and career are sketched with a few sharp, bold strokes. Even in the one difficult verse, there is this much clear, that it deals with the ministry of gracious words to weary souls, and that it is more likely the sustaining power, rather than the seasonable character of the word, that is made prominent. So we need not spend our strength, just now, on any problem of that kind, as we have in the passage so much that is clear and stimulating. The passage needs to be compared with the similar statement at the beginning of chapter forty-nine ; *there* the suffering is suggested, the shadow begins to appear, *here* we have a scene of bitter controversy and fierce battle. That which strikes us, at the first glance, is the sharp contrast between the inward experience and the outward life ; on the one side a man who is seeking to learn the deepest truths to use them for gentlest purposes ; on the other side the same man provoking intense resistance and brutal attack by seeking to bring those truths into the realm of common life and action. This is one of life's

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rude contrasts that is still with us ; our contemplation of the truth may be calm, our dreams of the coming kingdom rapturous, but when these seek to translate themselves into action they come into conflict with vulgar, commonplace, and narrow selfishness. Too often the keen thinker has not been fully appreciated until after he has been crushed by the world's dulness and stupidity ; the true glory of the prophet has begun to dawn upon his fellowmen when his long life of martyrdom has come to a cruel close. This tragic contrast is found on many pages of the sacred book and comes with overwhelming force in the life of the Christ ; the more so, because it is a permanent fact of human life. This cannot be changed by any smart satire and wild denunciation ; some of the noblest things of life come out of it. If only the saint could be content with a cloistered contemplation and find complete satisfaction in it ! But that, in many cases, would be simply the most refined selfishness. Let us turn, then, in a teachable spirit, to the specific features of a life in which this contrast finds a fuller expression.

II. THE PREPARATION FOR FAITHFUL MINISTRY.
There is here presented the ministry of noble speech, to which the true prophets have been called. Whether we take it to be the right word spoken at the right time, the word appropriate to the circumstances of the community and the individual, or the speech that quickens and sustains by the power of its message, the principle

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is the same. Our attention is called to the dignity and energy of living words. Words may be idle things, mere "sound and fury signifying nothing," and yet they can scarcely be said to signify absolutely nothing, as they are an index to the mind of him that utters them. But if we admit that frivolous shallow words are empty, useless things, we must also concede that great words may be great things, "half-battles," "miracle-working forces." Often it has happened that into a few striking sentences there have been concentrated the hopes and fears of a whole generation. Living watchwords, struck out in the heat of personal passion and national enthusiasm, have gone on to a conquering career freighted with solemn associations. These poems themselves, in fact the whole book of consolation, are an illustration of the abiding power of gentle speech.

This ministry is a ministry of gentleness, as we may see from its avowed purpose to carry comfort to the weary in the hour of deepest need. It is addressed to those who are fainting in the struggle or losing heart in the battle. It aims to stimulate them to new hope and brace them to more energetic effort. In their life it is no doubt a critical hour; they are in danger through the pressure of circumstances of losing hold of God. They have been overborne by sudden disaster; cold, chilling scepticism creeps about their hearts. In such an hour, one of God's greatest gifts to a man or nation is "the Son of Consolation," whose message shows its strength by its very

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calmness. In a great sorrow the power of silent sympathy may be shown, but it is important that when the tongue *is* released from its bondage it should discourse in wise simplicity of the things of God (Psalm xxxix.). In an age of much speech, of unceasing agitation and popular appeal, we are apt to disparage preaching and speak with cynical contempt of the ceaseless babble; but in our thoughtful moments we know that the real prophetic word cannot fail, it will find its audience fit, though few, and will continue its ministry of mercy.

Behind the speech of the right quality, there is something more than the orator's natural ability, the impulse and the power of expression; there is the inward quality of thought and the secret preparation. This is "the disciple's tongue," the speech of one who has learned great lessons in a spirit of humility. We need not undervalue culture gained in the college or in the commerce of life, but this can only be at its best when its roots are deep in the life of the spirit. The servant claims to be taught of God, and we know well that the man so taught is the most receptive to all other noble teaching. What God has taught through the great prophets and saints of the past, this man has appropriated and in this way was prepared for the *direct* teaching that came with each new day from his divine Lord. Discipleship seems to some people to be a shallow, slavish thing. It may, of course, be that, if it degenerates into mere formal repetition and imitation. Such, however, is not its essential

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nature. It is not at warfare with individuality, as may be seen from the strong personal expression in this passage. The greatest artists and thinkers are those who have absorbed most fully the noblest elements of the past as a preparation for representing the highest thought of their own age. The divine kingship of Jesus Christ is not seen in anything more fully than in this, *that His slaves are free men*. The more they sought discipleship, the more they found personal life and individual character. The man who would teach and comfort others must surely go to school, in the deepest sense ; he must have the disciple's heart, that he may gain the disciple's tongue.

Some have maintained that what we have in this passage is not the ideal of a prophetic speaker, but the picture of a student poring over the law, that he may speak not with fierce impulse and fine frenzy, but with the calm authority of a quiet teacher who expounds the great revelation. There may be something in this view, but it must not be pressed too far ; *we have here a distinct acknowledgment of the daily revelation*. Such words could not have come from one who believed that God's truth was locked up in a book or imprisoned in a formula ; it is the language of an alert, eager soul. The ear is opened every morning to catch the new message. The soul waits upon God, and not simply on the book ; there is really no discord between these two, rather is there a living harmony ; the past can yield its true teaching only to the man who catches God's revelation to his own generation.

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The cry, " Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth," never fails of its response ; it comes from one who has the right attitude in the presence of God and Truth. He *hears as the disciples*, because he is eager and expectant, as he waits upon the Great Teacher. Hence his speech is not glib talk, but an expression of the deep God-inspired life. Having cast his own weariness upon God, the true servant can speak to others a quickening and sustaining word.

III. THE WORLD'S HARSH RECEPTION. We pass now, out of that calm region of meditation and communion, into the world's battlefield, and we hear the servant tell of contradictions met, and persecutions undergone. He did not flinch, though the opposition was sharp and brutal. Strange it seems that a man shall go from the hour of prayer and thoughtful communion with the Highest, and seek to apply the lessons learned in the silent hours, only to face noisy oppositions. We are not told the specific form of the message : there is simply given to us the sharp contrast between the secret preparation and the public rejection, with the suggestion that *the unflinching temper grew out of the calm reflection.*

It is the law of life that the thought that comes in quiet hours, the vision claiming to be from heaven, shall stand the test of controversy and the strain of common life. This is no doubt needful and just, but sometimes the test seems too severe, the contradiction of life too harsh. Men who desire good, and mean well, break down

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under its fierce pressure. The man who stands the test is the man who has counted the cost and chosen deliberately the divine service as the supreme good. Such a man has clearly set aside the popular standards of success ; he is prepared to face what the world calls failure. He sets his face like a flint ; stupid misinterpretation and vile abuse cannot put him to shame. Such a life, for example, was that of the prophet Jeremiah, in one of the most stormy periods of Israel's history. Here was a man naturally of gentle disposition who could have delighted to dwell in nature's pleasant places, with simple companions ; but he was chosen to be the unflinching bearer of a stern message, he had to resist the strong currents of popular opinion, and denounce the false prophets. He has a deep intercourse with the God of his fathers ; he wrestles with Jehovah until he gains clearness of vision, then he goes forth on the path of duty, which is always to him a way of sorrow. The common idea formed of him, even now, is apt to be that of a melancholy weakling who weeps on the slightest provocation, and who lives in a gloomy world of his own. The fact is different ; if we read his poems we find a man who had a keen love for nature, and a rich sympathy with human life, a man who would gladly have endured any pain if he could have saved his people from their delusions. Forty long years he toiled, apparently in vain, but he could not give up the work ; he had heard the message in the inner sanctuary of his soul and he could not draw back (Jer. i.). In such a case the

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martyrdom is more real than in any one sharp conflict with death. He faced death many times, but what was more bitter was the suspicion and contempt of those whom he wished to save. "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He has left behind a great testimony, not much studied by the world it may be, but with great power in its influence on many who have the spirit of true discipleship. He might well have uttered this pathetic cry :

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that
plucked off the hair,
I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

This is the martyr spirit, the spirit that in all ages has saved the truth and enlarged it, sending it on to us as a precious heritage and a great responsibility. We are prone to think that the supreme thing is *to live and be comfortable*. In the presence of these great heroes, the true servants of God, we become ashamed of our selfishness, and we know that our ideals are low and unworthy of the highest manhood. We think, for example, of the Son of man, setting His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem knowing that He would meet there the fate of the true Prophet. Then we learn once more that there is something more important than our small convenience and personal pleasure. It is a mystery that God should demand such sacrifice and that life should be so full of contradictions. We sometimes chafe and fret at such perplexing

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conditions, and yet we know that it is *the glory of a man to conquer opposition and be loyal to the truth.*

IV. THE UNCONQUERABLE CONFIDENCE OF TRUE FAITH. "For the Lord Jehovah will help me, therefore I have not been confounded. Behold the Lord Jehovah will help me, who is he that shall condemn me?" We listen once more to the great cry, "If God be for us who can be against us?" (Rom. viii. 31). This is not mere defiance of the world; it is triumphant confidence in God. This man has already learned in some measure the secret of Jesus, "I shall be alone, yet not alone, for the Father is with me" (John xvi. 32). A faithful man can stand alone, if he has the consciousness that the bitter isolation into which he is driven by his fellow men only drives him closer to the divine presence. This is not easy; there is no soft tone here; it is the cry of bitter pain and passionate struggle. Centuries later the great apostle of the Gentiles can speak in the same tone and utter the same victorious question: "It is God that justifieth, who is he that shall condemn?" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. viii. 35). The answer to that question does not need to be given; it is implied in the ringing tones which express an unconquerable faith. But again we say this is not easy: the faith that links a man to God does not separate him from

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his kind. The man who is in a certain sense most self-sufficient, who has rich resources in his own life, is also the man of keenest sympathy, craving true human fellowship. When man falls away from Him, the Christ appeals in plaintive tones to His intimate disciples, "Will ye also go away?" and yet the true servant must at times endure complete isolation, alone with his message and his God.

Is not this a great faith, to be cherished in a time of confusion, and in the face of misinterpretation; this confidence *that at the heart of the world there is justice?* The noblest men have often had to be content to appeal to God and the future, and they found that sufficient. The fact that they were treated unjustly, their purpose misunderstood, and their noblest efforts contemned, did not alter this conviction. They walked by faith, not by sight. When justice seemed to have fled from the earth, they appealed to the highest tribunal, their prayer rose to heaven, and they stayed themselves upon their God. What we have here is a call to settle the matter by a final appeal before a competent court; the servant is willing to meet his opponents if they will appear with him in the presence of God. His adversaries will be put to shame and they will perish because they have rejected the living truth, and chosen the way of perverse pride. When the controversy is over, the servant will stand in calm strength, because his vindicator will appear and make his cause shine out in its true light.

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This confidence we should be able to appropriate to ourselves, but not in any narrow bigotry or spiritual arrogance. Before such words can be justified from the lips of mortal man, he must be sure that he is suffering for the righteous cause and that his supreme concern is for the truth. The eternal God is not called to arrange our small quarrels or soothe our petty personal irritations ; but if we have subdued ourselves to the spirit of discipleship, if we have in the sanctuary seen a real vision and grasped a great truth, and then have met with persecution on account of our loyalty to God, though we have many imperfections and are burdened with much weakness, we may find solace in this confident appeal : “The Lord God will help me, who is he that shall condemn me ? ”

IX

The Servant as Sufferer and Sacrifice

He is despised and rejected of men ;
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ;
And we hid as it were our faces before him ;
He was despised and we esteemed him not.
Surely he hath borne our grief.
And carried our sorrows ;
Yet we did esteem him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities :
The chastisement of our peace was upon him ;
And with his stripes we are healed. (*ISAIAH liii. 3-5.*)

THE poem, *Isaiah lii. 13-liii. 12* should be read as a whole ; it is unfortunate that, by the present arrangement of the chapters, the connection is broken. We are treating separately the suffering and the glory, but there is therefore the greater need to emphasise the unity of the subject. The poet adopts the method which we find elsewhere ; he states at the beginning the exaltation of the servant (*lii. 13*) and then, after the vivid description of suffering and rejection he comes back to it again at the close. (*liii. 12*, cf. the form of *Psalm lxxiii.*) A glance at the Revised Version of our English Bible will remind us that

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there are difficulties in the text of this great poem and different opinions as to the best way of translating some of the most important phrases. The portion quoted above is, however, free from serious textual problems.

We meet again the critical question, whether the servant is to be regarded as the nation or a person. The majority of Christian scholars now hold the Jewish interpretation that, though the picture is highly individualised, it still refers to the suffering nation. But the arguments for a later date and personal interpretation have a certain amount of force, so that we cannot claim that the question has received a final settlement. In either case the problem of vicarious suffering, though not new, receives here a nobler presentation.

The men of science have during the last generation preached, in many forms, that the present grows out of the past, and that through countless ages, by nature's painful toil, life has attained a richer fulness. Now we see clearly that we cannot do justice to the Bible unless we frankly recognise this as the method of Divine providence. Hence it is well to contemplate this picture of suffering as *a growth from the past* and *a prophecy of the future*. It may perhaps be claimed that if it is the suffering of a nation for the good of the outside world, then the suffering has a wider range and more of a missionary character than in the case of an individual servant, however great, who suffers simply for the sins of his own people. But even that distinction

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is not to be unduly pressed, it may be more apparent than real ; it did not prove possible by any hedge of law or national boundary to confine the influence of the great servants of Israel, not to speak of the Greatest, to their own land and people. This missionary influence is in the character of the life and not in its formal expression.

I. THE SUFFERING SERVANT. Here is the picture of a great sufferer ; every phrase of this vivid description has burned itself into the hearts of Christian disciples ; and this passage, especially through its association with Gethsemane and Calvary, has done more than any other words to make men feel that sorrow may have a sacred character and a sacrificial power. There is no word spoken by the servant himself in this passage ; we are told that he suffers in silence. We do not hear from his lips the pathetic cry,

Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends :
For the hand of God hath touched me. (Job xix. 21.)

And yet we feel somehow that it is not a sullen silence, but the calmness of one who meditates more deeply than his fellows upon the mystery of life. His loneliness may have been, in a measure, due to the greatness of his mission ; such loneliness is part of the price that great souls have to pay for their clear vision and high vocation. But this was evidently aggravated by the nature of the disease which came upon him in the course of his career, and the

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interpretation that was put upon it, so that he could have said :

My kinsfolk have failed,
And my familiar friends have forgotten me.
All my inward friends abhor me :
And they whom I loved are turned against me.

JOB xix. 14, 19.

Still, from whatever cause it comes, the loneliness is a part of the suffering ; and the misinterpretation which treats his pain as mere punishment from the hand of God forms another element in it. To be separated from his fellows because they regard him as cast off by God ; to be surrounded by this atmosphere of suspicion and fear is surely an overwhelming burden to one who is seeking to spread a great message and to achieve a high task. To grasp its real significance, we must remember the dramatic form in which the prophecy is cast. It is a prophecy of the vindication and triumph of the servant ; the sorrow is lifted up into the light of the future glory, and in this heavenly light the popular interpretation of it, which seems quite natural, is seen to be false. It is not a startling thing that the prophet should be a sufferer, in that he shares the common lot of humanity ; it is not strange that the popular interpretation should be put upon it, that was natural enough. The really wonderful thing is, that the prophet can lift up this suffering into that divine light in which it is transfigured. It is here that the inspiration of God and the faith of the prophet play their part. The glory is depicted as an

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actual event in the history of the servant, but it is by the eye of faith that the poet reads the story thus written in the book of fate ; his different view of suffering comes from a God-given insight into the deeper meaning of life. Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God hath prepared for them that love Him, but unto us God hath revealed them through the Spirit (lxiv. 4, 1 Cor. ii. 9).

We are often warned that in our study of the writings belonging to a different and distant time, we ought not to read into them the loftier ideals and more profound philosophy of later generations. But the fact that, in so many cases, this is so easily done suggests that the germ of great Christian truths is already there. We have to admit that, even with the most conscientious effort, it is difficult to place ourselves in the circumstances and atmosphere of a remote time. Perfect knowledge of such a period would shed light on many an obscure phrase, and show very clearly that the noblest saints were even more hampered than we have supposed by the limitations of their age and country. But the loss of historical knowledge and archæological accuracy is not all loss. It is not altogether to be regretted that time has had a softening effect on many of these pictures, causing some harsh local features to fall away, and give prominence to the permanent principles. Thus the book that, by God's providence, came out of the life of a particular nation, rises into the light of eternity

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and becomes universal in its character, a Bible of humanity.

II. THE EVERLASTING PROBLEM OF SUFFERING.

There is nothing more human than the story of suffering in its varied forms, and the attempts at its explanation. One of the earliest views shows that suffering was a great mystery to men living in what we call more "primitive" conditions. Of course they had common sense ; they knew that if you put your hand into the fire you will be burnt ; many such facts and consequences they had received from the past or gained by personal experience. But they would put the hand into the fire to please their God. We may call that foolish superstition, but it was really a faith that was in grim earnest. Precisely that kind of faith that we call irrational and immoral dominates the minds of millions in the world to-day. To pour cynical scorn upon it avails nothing, and we feel that the painful slowness with which it is transformed by prophetic preaching is still one of the tragic aspects of life. When we say that national disaster and personal misfortune were mysteries to these men, we mean that their only explanation of it was the will of God and that was to them a capricious will. In their view, God might be jealous of man's prosperity or even strike out in the blind fury of a senseless anger. The poet represents Job as being in danger of yielding to this view of an irrational God. They did not then possess a large view of the ordered world ;

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“ law ” they knew, but with simpler, less comprehensive meaning. We to-day know that crowds of people gathered together to present a painful penance to their God may spread disease and death by their physical uncleanness. To us the law by which this happens is reasonable and beneficent, one of the healthful saving forces of the world. To them the fact was a tremendous burden to be relieved, not by science and sanitation, but by more ritual and religious “ cleanliness.” The complete denial of God or gods did not come within the scope of their thought so that they must do their best to guard against the uncertain action of unseen spiritual powers.

III. NEW LIGHT ON ITS SIGNIFICANCE. The view that suffering is a definite punishment for particular transgressions of the divine will is surely a high one, though it may be hard and cruel in individual cases when it becomes a fixed dogma. There is in it the recognition of reason and law. It can be translated into our modern dialect and made to cover a variety of cases. We may be allowed to speak of epidemics of cholera and typhoid as a punishment for uncleanness. When these come, in spite of the light that has been bought by painful experience and research, we may say they are the penalty of political corruption with its consequent business inefficiency. *And in these cases also the guilty often escape, while the innocent are sacrificed.* The Jews worked out with great care the theory of retribution ; it was in its extreme form a mechanical

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application of the prophetic preaching of God's judgment against social iniquity and national unrighteousness. It covers many of the facts of life; it represents stern realities. Surely much suffering comes from personal indulgence, corporate selfishness and other similar causes. As an aspect of truth this theory of retribution is valuable; when it claims a monopoly of the truth, like all monopolies, it becomes cruel; sensitive souls have dashed themselves against it, it has doomed the innocent to despair. These forms of thought and survivals of primitive feeling linger in our hearts. If we met the servant of God labouring under a hard fate, suffering from terrible plagues, living in an atmosphere of suspicion, are we sure that the feeling would not arise in our hearts—"this man is smitten of God and afflicted"? These thoughts live in our feeling when they have passed out of our creed.

It is well, then, to remember that men of the distant past wrestled bravely with these great questions and that our freedom from superstition in the face of sorrow, and from fear in the presence of God, is not due altogether to our superior intelligence, but to the fact that the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places and we have a goodly heritage. The author of the Book of Job faced the problem seriously and fought a fierce battle. In his book many suggestions can be found concerning the punishment of sin and the discipline of affliction. He would not admit that life with its changing fortunes could be completely explained from the fact of

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personal sin. If he had no new dogma to set in the place of the orthodox theory he made a large claim for liberty of criticism and expression. He showed us a soul under the pressure of severe pain struggling against a brutal idea of God, uttering plaintive cries to heaven and casting pathetic glances to the dim uncertain future. He finds relief in the large movement of nature where he can discover wisdom as well as power ; and he comes at last to bow in hopeful resignation before the throne of God. His battle is as much for the righteousness of God as for his own innocence. He has rendered a service for all time, not by the creation of a definite binding creed, but rather by the assertion that all creeds are too small for such a vast subject. The facts of life are many and varied. As we come to know ourselves and the world more fully we are justified in resisting popular misinterpretation of scholastic dogma. These things preserve some truth, but they must not be allowed to enslave the soul. Such scepticism as that so keenly expressed by this great poet prepared the way for a larger thought of God. He must indeed confess that he is " smitten of God and afflicted ", but he cannot accept this in the same sense as those who would point at him the finger of scorn and cry, " Where is now thy God ? "

The author of Psalm lxxiii., in a different way, trod the same sorrowful path. He tells us how he almost lost his faith and how it came back to him again when he viewed the panorama of human life in the light of the sanctuary.

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Brooding over the success of the wicked brought bitterness to his soul ; the sight of their arrogance and popularity vexed his heart. It was a dark enigma, an insoluble problem. He could not doubt the existence of Israel's God as in some sense the ruler of the world ; but it seemed as if God was indifferent to the petty cares of this common life and that the seeker after righteousness must carry on his struggle unaided and in vain. Here is surely a dark conclusion ; if this is to be preached as the finding of actual experience, it will paralyse the efforts of good men and increase the moral disorder. There must be something wrong in the observation of life or in the process of thought which leads to such a sad result. When one is lifted up into the light of God's presence and freed from small personal irritation many new aspects come into view. It is seen that the prosperity of the wicked is often an uncertain, disappointing thing. Further, it is noted that the scepticism came not from pure observation of the facts of life, but was partly due to spiritual blindness and folly in the thinker. To expect that the reward of goodness would come in coarse material forms was a blame-worthy form of stupidity. What explanation of the fact that his scepticism did not conquer his faith could there be except this, that even in the darkness, God had a secret hold upon His servant ? Thus the light grows clearer, the supreme fact shines forth, that goodness is its own reward, that God Himself is the abiding portion of the believer, that between the faithful

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soul and the living God there is a bond of fellowship that can live through the hour of despondency and may even survive the shock of death.

IV. THE END OF A LONG STORY. The suffering of the servant is brought into a similar atmosphere, though treated in a somewhat different style. Behind it there is the crude, popular belief, that it is the immediate purpose of God to give success to the worshipper, especially to the favourites. As we read of the sufferer's loneliness, we almost catch the echo of that mocking cry, "Where is now thy God?" The real sting of this question is in the assumption that prosperity is an infallible sign of God's favour, that the very fact of suffering shows the presence of the curse. Implicitly the prophet faces this and cries :

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities.

That men suffered for and with each other and that this was just a part of the essential order of human life—this was an old belief. For example, it was the custom to destroy the family or clan along with or instead of the actual criminal (*Joshua vii. 24*). In accordance with this idea the seven sons of Saul were sacrificed for the sins of their father, who himself had passed beyond the reach of vengeance. Thus was calamity removed and the sense of justice satisfied (*2 Sam. xxi.*) This rested on a belief in the

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physical oneness of those of the same blood. It was the first crude expression of something that we are now seeking to realize in a higher form ; the great truth of human brotherhood, which rests the claims of the needy, not upon mere pity or patronage, but on the possession of a common nature. This prophecy stands on a higher plane, it is related to the older view, but passes beyond it. A clearer recognition of individual responsibility had made men feel that there was real injustice in the ancient custom. It was decreed that a man should not suffer for the sins of his father (Deut. xxiv. 16). Prophets declared that it was not God's method to visit the sins of the guilty upon the innocent. Clear and sharp was the statement that each man must suffer for his own sin (Ezek. xviii.). And yet the fact remains that we are bound together in the order of life, and we do suffer with and for each other. In this picture of the servant we have no theory of sacrifice or propitiation, but there is a clear assertion that the suffering of the servant, which came upon him in the order of God's providence and which he meekly accepted, had a spiritual value for others. He accepts the burden or takes it upon himself in such a way that he in reality bears the burden of his people. We may not father upon the prophet our changing theologies ; the imperfect attempts that have been made to give expression to this truth. The perfect realization of it in the sacrificial life and death of our Lord does not hinder the apostle from calling upon

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his disciples to fill up that which is lacking in the sufferings of the Christ.

So of the saints in ancient Israel we may say that they without us were not made perfect. This is a truth for all time and it links together the lives of faithful men and noble women in all generations. To know that the servant of God has suffered for us may lead us to see the deeper meaning of life, and cause us to offer in and through his spirit the sacrifice of a contrite heart and a penitent spirit. To feel that even our suffering in the cause of righteousness and on account of sacred human ties can be a matter of more than personal significance, may take away something of the sting of pain and rob defeat of its bitterness and shame.

X

The Glorious Vindication of the Suffering Servant

He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days,
And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
He shall see of the travail of his soul,
And shall be satisfied. ISAIAH liii. 10, 11.

I. THE IDEAL SERVANT. This passage gives us one of the loftiest flights of Old Testament prophecy ; this classic picture of the suffering servant of God who bears, not with sullen indifference, but with silent patience, the appointed burden of sorrow, and so imparts to it a gracious sacrificial power, must remain forever one of the noblest poems in the world's sacred literature. It stimulates to reverent thoughtfulness even while it imparts tender consolation ; in the presence of such a great sorrow our small complaints are shamed into silence. Like other ancient pictures, it is worn and indistinct in some features, but we are thankful that the main outline is clear. The words that sprang from the sacred passion of a human soul, twenty-five centuries ago, survive with sufficient strength to rise into new life in response

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to sympathetic study. The question “ Of whom speaketh the prophet this ? ” is still alive, and quickens both intellectual interest and devout feeling.

Christian interpreters find that in one life with which we are all familiar this prophecy was not only realized but enlarged, transformed and glorified. They find in Jesus Christ the ideal sufferer who combined in fullest measure the worship of God and the service of humanity. In Him the love of men becomes the centre of religion and the supreme sacrifice to God.

But the question remains, What was the prophet’s own direct conscious meaning ? and that has been entangled in controversies concerning dates, analysis and authorship which are quite unsuited to popular discussion. It is, however, an important question ; Old Testament exposition has its rights which must be preserved. We may believe that New Testament teaching has, in a living fashion, grown out of the work of the earlier prophets, so that the Son of Man came “ in the fulness of time ” not to destroy but to fulfil. But this does not imply that the fully developed Christian doctrines are to be fixed on the Old Testament in such a way as to destroy our sense of perspective and historical growth. It is well that some of us should try to get back to the position where the prophet stood and from that point look out upon the great world drama that was unfolding itself before his eyes. If the perfect accomplishment of such a task is impossible, yet the effort is a

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spiritual exercise, an endeavour to realise one form of "the communion of saints." Many careful students hold that we have here not a *person*, but a *personification*, a poetic representation of the fact that Israel, the broken-hearted nation, suffering the sorrows of exile, was enduring a discipline and learning religious truths that possessed a significance for the great outside world. Others hold that these special poems are of later date than the book in which we find them ; that they give a picture of the Messiah in harmony with the nobler ideals of the later Jewish community, a gentle teacher, a patient martyr who is full of compassion for the ignorant among his own people and eager to send out God's light and truth into the larger world.

In an exposition or meditation, while recognizing the value of such discussions, we are content to leave them in the background, and dwell rather upon the thought that links these opposing views, viz., this : that the ideal for the community and the individual is the same ; that suffering should be accepted in meekness from the hand of God, and it will then be lifted into a transforming light. In either case we face the strange fact that in a world ordered by a God of love *the highest things are achieved through pain*. The true servant, national or individual, has always been a sufferer ; the sweetest songs have come out of the prison house ; the capacity for noble ministry has come through loyalty in noble service. The national ideal is more difficult to

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realize than the personal. There have been many strong men and gentle women who have, under the inspiration of the Christ, risen to great heights of unselfish service. But when men join together there is a loss of personal responsibility. It is difficult to organize the highest things. Selfish monopoly can easily express itself in committees and combines, but the ideal of loving service sometimes banishes and leaves only the dead machinery. And yet we must not despair, for while the political situation and international outlook is often disheartening, some real advance has been made. Thus the question "Of whom speaketh the prophet ?" may lead to profitable reflection and remind us that the divinest inspiration comes through the deepest human experience. The man who wrote this must have had the martyr-spirit, and some real touch of the martyr's experience. Out of the depths he cried unto God, and out of the depths he has given us an everlasting message. It had no doubt its relations to his circumstances, and these have now become dim, but it instinctively reached out towards a larger future. His vision is strong just because it faces the hardest facts of life and expresses the highest faith.

II. THE PROPHECY AND ITS FULFILMENT. We must lay emphasis on an important point in the structure of this poem which is partly hidden by the unfortunate division of the chapters. What we have here is not, taken as a whole, a lamentation, but a triumphant assertion of faith in

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view of past suffering. The poem begins with the clear statement that the Servant of Jehovah shall be raised to a high and glorious position which will provoke astonishment in its contrast with his former lowliness and sorrow. It closes with an equally emphatic declaration that "he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." True, the dark background of earlier suffering is given in vivid detail and has created a powerful impression. But we must not forget that the tragic suffering is set in a golden framework of unconquerable hope. The issue is so wonderful that it is expected to meet with incredulity; only by revelation, only through the vision of God could such a thing be known. To-day we have no doubts about the origin of such a vision; it has justified itself in the light of history and of life. It is not a coarse doctrine of compensations that pain here will, in a mechanical fashion, find an external reward in a luxurious heaven. This is something deeper; the faith that because the order of the world is under the guidance of a righteous God, therefore heroic goodness and sublime patience cannot be doomed to final defeat and despair. This faith still lives in so far as the Christian doctrine of the resurrection is not a dead dogma, but a real belief. The world's ignorance, bigotry and malice will not have the final word; God will speak the word of vindication, and this, like all His other words, is creative and satisfying.

The correspondence between this prophecy and the life and sacrifice of our Lord is not

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superficial and literal, but on this account is all the more real and deep. We love to think of Him as fair in form and perfect in feature, meeting the supreme crisis in the fresh strength and exuberant hope of youthful manhood. Though He was judicially murdered, He was not worn out by toil or wasted by leprous disease. He was cut off when a great career, as teacher and healer, was in its full swing. He had no posterity in the ordinary prosaic sense of that word. In fact, the search for exact literal correspondence is disappointing, from the point of view of the older idea of prediction. But the essential similarity and harmony is striking. He entered into the sorrows of men. He suffered through their narrowness and hardness; men saw some gleams of glory in his life, but they could not grasp its large significance. He knew the pain of being misunderstood; His wonderful ministry ended suddenly in sorrow and shame. Yet though few of us are really worthy of the great name of Christian, He has had a glorious posterity and the work of making disciples seems to be only in its beginnings. No life lived upon this earth has in any such sense and degree kindled in the hearts of men "the enthusiasm of humanity." Not in the outward splendour of the Church, not in eloquent speech nor in magnificent music and rapturous song does this find its highest manifestation; rather in the faithful testimony, the brave deed, the kindly act. When all allowance is made for the failures of the Church we can still feel the thrill of joy springing from the

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prophetic power of the words, “ He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.”

The dark background against which this light of faith shines has its noble purpose. If we were speaking from a literary standpoint, we might say that in the strong contrast, in the golden light that breaks through the dark clouds there is an artistic effect ; but that would be true only in so far as we can speak of artistic effects in nature. The man of great genius and high spiritual power is most effective from what we call the artistic side, when he is most natural. The truth is that, while the poet was not thinking of art, but of life, the noblest thought and deepest life creates strength of expression and beauty of form.

A man is musing over the central mystery of life and, while he is musing, the fire of inspiration burns and he speaks words of deep wisdom in those pathetic tones (Psalm xxxix.). We must fight the same battle and face the hard problem, but communion with the saints of other days is ordained for our help. Some tell us with a fine scientific air that there is no mystery in suffering, only a necessity springing from the order of the world and the relationship of men with each other ; and the suffering thus involved renders service in the way of warning, correction and discipline. Yet, in our calm, rational moments we can see all this in a clear, dry light. But, in the first place, let us not forget how men had to toil and suffer to gain this measure of clearness ; the order of the world is not only a gift of God, it is an achievement of humanity, conquered with

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infinite toil and pain. In the Book of Job, where a great poet wrestles with this hard subject, you can find, in a simpler form, most of these modern solutions ; it is easy in that case also to classify and arrange them, but having gathered them together, you will find that in the same book they are rudely set aside as insufficient. You meet there, even in violent language, the passionate volcanic outbursts of a soul in pain, climbing to the very throne of God and clamouring for justice. This is quite natural, because, however complete a creed we may have in regard to such vital matters, we must each in our supreme moments work out the problem afresh. We have our hours of bitterness when all our satisfactory scientific explanations fall away and we are alone with our suffering and our God.

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God.

Now we can see why the writer of this Book of Consolation has been called "The Evangelist of the Old Testament." The title "Evangelist" has a literal justification as it comes to us from the Greek word that is used to translate the Hebrew term, "teller of good tidings" (xl. 9). It has further a real spiritual appropriateness in the nature of his message. If this great poem comes from the same writer as the rest of the book, the honourable name is even more fully vindicated, as here we have the story of the Cross.

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But, in any case, "the good news," the news that is to build up a ruined nation and bind up broken hearts, comes in the form of a gentler thought of God and a deeper view of suffering. This surely is a suggestion of and a preparation for the revelation that comes to us in the Christ. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men must not be separated in any sentimental fashion from the stern facts of life. We still need the Old Testament with its thoughts of God's Kingship and its demands for social righteousness. When we stand on the lofty height of New Testament revelation and rejoice in the clearness of the Christian hope, we do well to think with gratitude of those who pressed onward through the long, hard journey, when the light was very dim. The central truth that they kept clearly in view was, that God is strong and righteous, keeping faith with His people, and, in His own time, will turn their sorrow into joy. Whether we may see, here, simply a promise of national restoration, or are justified in finding a suggestion of personal immortality, the principle is the same, that noble men do not labour in vain in their efforts to worship God and serve mankind.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy,
Though he go on his way weeping,
Bearing forth the seed,
He shall come again with joy,
Bringing his sheaves. PSALM CXXVI. 5, 6.

III. THE VICTORY OF FAITH. The world that looked with scorn upon the suffering of the

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servant, not dreaming of its true significance, shall be startled into silent astonishment when it beholds his unexpected vindication. This has been fulfilled in the case of many a misunderstood teacher and many a struggling cause, but the greatness of the prophetic vision consists in this, that he saw it, as a thing already realized, before it became visible to the gaze of a sceptical, cynical world. This is not a simple faith, or childlike hope ; it is the faith that has been through fierce battle and of which it may be said, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." We need the ministry of these strong voices when our own faith falters and our hope is frail. We have an intellectual advantage in that we can look back upon a longer sweep of history and see how often apparent failure has been a real success. The proud, ostentatious movement, calling itself epoch-making, claiming to be the most significant discovery of the century, has often become barren and passed into insignificance, while the contemptible, unheralded beginning has been transformed into a world-wide enterprise. So from this great vision of the prophet we may learn that things are not to be judged by common standards ; they must be lifted into the light of the heavenly truths. God redeems good men and noble movements from misinterpretation, and gives them ■ destiny corresponding to their inward character. The true service shall not fail ; if it fall to the ground, that can only be because as a living seed it seeks to escape through death to a fuller life. The

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life lost in service, surrendered in sacrifice, comes back with a quickening blessing upon it. The suffering servant shall not be finally crushed ; he who has learned sympathy in the furnace of affliction shall know that the heart of God is wonderfully kind. In many ways it has been fulfilled in the light of the Divine Master, and the experience of the lowly disciple, that the true servant “ shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.”

XI

The Great Invitation (ISAIAH LV.)

Ho ! all that are thirsty come to the waters,
All ye that are strengthless eat,
Yea, come, buy grain without money
And wine and milk without price.
Why spend money for what is not bread,
And your earnings for what does not satisfy ?
Only hearken to me and what is good ye shall eat,
And your soul shall be delighted with dainties.

THIS wonderful book (xl.-lv.), whether it is exactly in the form that its original author left it or not, closes in a graceful, effective manner. After the pathetic figure of the suffering servant (l.iii.) there follows the brilliant picture of the restoration of Zion ; O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires (liv. 11) ; then comes the closing appeal to the community to accept the salvation and prepare for the dawning of the new day. The prophet returns to the beginning of his message (xl.), not by mere repetition of phrases but by giving a new invitation that rests upon the same belief in the living Word of God (xl. 8 ; lv. 11).

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The message is to the community, a community that is broken and scattered; the nation is lacking in visibility and organization, but it lives in the mind of the poet as a possible Kingdom of God. One verse is regarded by careful students as out of place, viz., this rich offer of forgiveness that has formed the basis of many powerful *personal* appeals: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God for he will abundantly pardon (lv. 7). The chief reason for thinking that this mention of the wicked man was added later by some pious scribe is that it breaks the connection; the contrast on which the prophet lays such stress is *not* between man's wicked thoughts and God's pure thoughts but between the smallness of man's ideas and the largeness of Jehovah's programme. This argument is reinforced by the fact that this preacher has in his great discourse nothing of the personal and pastoral; it is Jerusalem as a city, or Zion as a community that is ever before his mind's eye, when from his cloistered place he sends forth sweet songs that seem to agree so little with the harshness of the times.

I. THE CALL TO THE NEW KINGDOM. This is a call to choose the real substance of life instead of the vain shadows. It has been suggested that the prophet begins by imitating the cry of the water-carriers in the street, but in this case the water is given, not sold. Refreshing water in a

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thirsty land is a fit and favourite symbol of God's grace. Here also are corn and wine to give a festive touch to the invitation. The meaning seems to be that those who remain in Babylon, even if they gain comfortable circumstances, will be losers in the deep spiritual sense (lili. 11). They must, in any case, toil to live, but if they lose their share in the sacred community they will forfeit a precious privilege and fall to a lower rank of citizenship. It is religion that he is teaching but blended in a noble fashion with patriotism, because for him the city of God must have a local habitation and a name. But, as compared with the sharp, definite teaching of other prophets, there is around his message a vagueness, a mysterious haze of poetry. It is clear that something is offered without money and without price and that this gift has in it a deeper satisfaction than anything that money can buy. It seems strange to him that people can spend so much energy and anxiety on things that cannot give nourishment to the higher life and that have no relation to God's great plan.

It is also clear that to those who accept the gift of redemption the way to service is opened. If they find their true place in the city of God not only will they find a life which will be its own reward, but also a light which will attract those who *are* seeking the truth. The reliable promises given to their greatest king, David, will soon be fulfilled in them: Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee,

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because of Jehovah thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel ; for He hath glorified thee. All very beautiful, men might say, but what does it mean and what are the signs of its coming ? We can answer that question better to-day than the men who responded to the call and sought to realize the new Kingdom in their old land. No startling material miracle came to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose ; not by any sensational magic did the walls arise and the new temple stand before their eyes. When we know the hard, prosaic tasks that faced the little band of patriots who led the forlorn hope we can understand the cry :—Many there be that say, who will show us any good ? (Psalm iv. 6). The man who was tormented by that question did not attempt to answer it. No answer was then possible, but it wrung from his heart the prayer : Jehovah, lift Thou upon us the light of Thy countenance, and the sublime assertion that there is something better than corn and wine. We know that though it cost those Jews so much to restore the broken thread of their national life it was good for them and the world that they kept alive their faith and worship and made Jerusalem a centre towards which their scattered brethren might turn in the hour of prayer. Not yet could the religion break all connection with the land, new questions had to be answered, new influences absorbed, and new battles fought. The restoration and renewal of the religion in Palestine was in the highest sense a new miracle ; God's greatest wonders are wrought through the devotion of loyal, determined

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men. As the centuries go by, the great promise received an ampler fulfilment: Out of Zion shall go forth the teaching, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem (*Isaiah ii. 3*).

II. THE PLACE OF GOD'S WORD IN THE GREAT WORLD. There is no harm in repeating the statement that the prophet began his great message by pointing out that the great empires of the world, Nineveh and Babylon, wither like the grass and fade like the flower, but "the word of our God shall stand for ever," and closes his book with a beautiful comparison of that word with the ever present natural forces, the rain and snow, upon which the earth depends for its life and fruitfulness. It was well that he placed the power of the word alongside of the things that we count common and commonplace and not with the uncertain lightning and erratic earthquake (cf. *I Kings xix. 11*). The way in which he treats "the word of God," as well as the position that he assigns to it in his scheme of thought, shows that he draws upon the best experience of the past and gives it the stamp of his own individuality. Such a phrase as "the word of God" is apt to become conventional, and so to seem stale, and sound like what the world calls "cant." It is well to get behind the stock phrases in any sphere of thought, and learn that familiar ideas have a wonderful history, that once they were filled with fresh life-blood and stirred men to painful sacrifice and enthusiastic service.

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“The word” is one of the miracles and mysteries of life which is apt to lose something of its wonder because it has been so long with us. The new extensions of it, by means of the latest inventions, may startle us and seem to have around them something uncanny. But the fact that men have been able to coin “words,” significant sounds or written signs, which bring, even if imperfectly, the soul of one man into close contact with the soul of his fellow-man—is there not in this an element of mystery that familiarity cannot destroy? Those whom we call “primitive men” felt this intensely, because they had not lost altogether the feeling for the newness of life, they had not had their souls drilled and stupefied by the mechanism of an artificial “civilization.” The “name” was not a mere label, it was something real, carrying with it part of the quality of the thing or person to which it belonged. A man’s name was not to be trifled with, he might even desire to keep it from an enemy lest its mysterious power should be turned against himself. The name of a god was still more important; it was thought that the possession of it gave power to wrest a secret or to gain a blessing from the unseen sphere (Gen. xii. 27). The Hebrew religion freed itself from the black magic which was so common among the Babylonians and Egyptians so that all that dark realm of incantations and curses is foreign to us. But in that stern process it did not lose the sense of mystery; the Name came to mean God Himself and the personal name

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Jehovah or Yahweh which we can use reverently ceased to be spoken by the Jews. There may be a touch of superstition about this fear of the actual name, but there may be also a dim feeling that as no image can represent God, so no definite name can compass the awful sublimity of the divine nature.

So through the history of Israel the phrase “word of God” grows in meaning and power. God speaks to the man and woman in the garden ; He talks with Moses as a man talks to his friend and His word has power to fulfil itself. It comes to the prophets in times of excitement and in hours of quiet meditation. Then the creative word grasps the whole world (Gen. i.) ; He spoke and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast (Psalm xxxiii. 9). But may we not say that we reach a higher place when the prophet views “the word of God” as a *force* which like the snow and rain comes from the heavens and enters into the life of earth and never fails to accomplish its purpose ? This cannot be confined to a definite prediction or the written law ; it suggests more than the prophet meant and he meant something of vast importance. We cannot say exactly how much of what we call “physical science” was known to him, or in other words, how far he understood the system by which water circulates round the earth and changes its fortunes. Though he lived at a time when the pathway to a glorious future seemed to be black, he would not have accepted the pessimistic view of the Preacher that there is no progress but

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simply a ceaseless circling round (Eccles. i.). But we are justified in extending his prospect and in believing that even the greatest empires which perished left behind something for humanity. "The word of God" is larger than any book or code of laws; it is the communion of God with humanity, the impact of heavenly forces upon the lowly life of earth. In the great catastrophe when society seems to be shaken to pieces, and the Church is reproached for her utter failure, this "word of God" is working in its own ways. When the thought of "a new age" is ridiculed, and the hopes of a brighter future are met with scornful contempt, there comes to the true poet once more the cry: "Behold I make all things new." And the everlasting mystery remains that the price for the new freedom and larger life should still have to be paid in the tears and blood of those who serve and suffer.

III. THE MIRACLE OF THE NEW AGE.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree,
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.
And it shall be to Jehovah for a name,
For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This, one may say, is poetry, the dream of an idealist who with an easy optimism makes light of the stubborn facts of real life. He could put forth wings like the eagle and soar into the clear blue sky. But, when the time came to attempt a reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem, its temple and the Jewish Church, men learned that

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a large measure of divine grace was needed to enable them "to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint." After any great disaster, when the nation has been bowed down under a great strain, the patriotism and poetry that has sustained men and given a touch of romance to the severe endurance and exhausting toil seems to vanish, it fades into the dim light of common day and men face again the commonplace reality. The temple has to be built by a people who are oppressed by poverty and weakened by a sense of bitter disappointment. The walls have to be built in the face of the irritating mockery of a vulgar foe. The period after the exile has been regarded as dreary and barren. There has even been applied to it the foolish phrase, "Four Hundred Years of Silence." The writer of this poem did not believe in a silent God. For him divine messages were always coming from nature, history, and the gentle voice that speaks to the human soul. Now we know that in an age that seemed so dull and prosaic there was reverent thought and living poetry. Ritualism and legality could not completely crush simple, spontaneous piety. Judaism might to some extent grow hard and stiff, but it did not treat the great literature of the past in any sectarian fashion ; it preserved for later ages a book which has become the supreme revelation of God to the world. The world has still its thorns and briars, but the prophet's word has found a real fulfilment in many parts of the earth and in many spheres of life. The missionary book has

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gone forth and the missionary work has had a great beginning.

This prophet does not speak of missionary organization and propaganda in the modern sense, but he bears witness with greater clearness than any other prophet to the conviction that the message which Israel inherits from the past and receives in the living present is too large and deep to be a Jewish monopoly. By its very nature it cries out for a larger world, it is the voice of God to humanity and the cry of humanity to God. The world is only beginning to have a glimpse of its majesty and power. It has inspired many a battle for freedom and many a struggle for righteousness. The influence of true religion has turned dark, desolate places into fruitful fields and gardens of delight. It still has its work to do which cannot be completely accomplished by economic reform and political action.

The book, the life that produced it, and the life that it inspires remain an everlasting sign. At this source the Church, quickened by the ever present spirit, renews its life. The great Teacher came not to destroy but to fulfil, and that which He has fulfilled in the largest measure is the great vision of service enshrined in this book.

The angels' song, at His coming, of

Glory to God in the highest,
And peace on earth to men of good will

can only pass from prophecy to reality to that extent that the spirit of sacrifice and service

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enters into all our souls and into all the relationships of life. The Kingdom of God that His disciples longed for and expected did not come at once with its full glory. Through many a weary wilderness the Church has had to pass, many an hour of disappointment she has known. After great crises and crusades the picture of "the suffering servant" has lived again in the life of the Lord and His faithful disciples. The noise of the world had never been able to drown completely "the new song"; it renews itself from age to age; coming from the God of heaven to the hearts of prophets and poets, it triumphs over the most brutal facts. When the old world lies in ruins faithful souls hear again the voice saying, "Behold I make all things new." Thus every conquest over ignorance and unbelief, every triumph over wrong, every vindication of the fact that man does not live by bread alone but by the abiding spiritual word is a new manifestation of the "everlasting sign."

XII

The Abiding Question

I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this ?
Of himself or of some other ? ACTS viii. 34.

I. THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

This text brings us to a period about six centuries later than those that have been studied, but it has a living relation to them and may well serve for a final review. Again we find ourselves in a critical age of the world's history ; it is the birth of Christianity, and the beginning of the Christian Church. The Jewish Church has closed its sacred Canon and fallen back proudly upon its great past ; the Christians go forth with the clear conviction that they are not traitors to that past, but that in their Master the ancient prophecies are fulfilled and glorified. It was a great revival of religion, a new stage in the onward movement of humanity towards a loftier faith. It was a wonderful age, great world currents had met and mingled, and in the centre of the stage there was the figure of the crucified One destined to stand out in clearer light, and more attractive power. The first martyr had fallen asleep amid a shower of stones, praying for his enemies, and proving that

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the risen Christ was living in the hearts and lives of His disciples. Others were ready to step into the vacant place, looking for the coming kingdom and eager for the martyr's crown. The evangelist who, by his simple power, had put to shame the magician at Samaria, is now called to meet an audience of one and answer the keen question, of an eager soul. This meeting is a parable teaching us that Providence is working in the intimate personal life as well as in great world movements ; two men touch each other's lives at a single point, and for a few moments ; but they share a great spiritual treasure and a common enthusiasm, they are brought into one great brotherhood. Philip is moved by the memory of his Lord to carry the great message beyond all sectarian or national barriers. The eunuch has already come halfway, for he has been to Jerusalem to worship.

II. THE WRITTEN WORD AND THE LIVING PREACHER. Here we have a fulfilment of the glowing prophecies uttered in the darkest hour of Israel's history. Jerusalem has become an attraction for many people of different races and tongues (*Isaiah ii. 2-4*). This man of Ethiopia is a type of men who have found in ancient psalm and prophecy a divine message more tender and true than anything that the world's philosophy could give. The book has begun its world-wide journey and kindled a loyal response in many hearts. The hedge round the Law and the hostility of many Jews to the outside world

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could not hide altogether the universal significance of the great revelation. Though the Jews had not heard with perfect clearness the missionary command, " Go ye into all the world and teach all nations," their God had thrust them out into that larger world with a book that contained suggestions of this great enterprise.

This scene is now so familiar that we cease to marvel at it, but it is well sometimes to pause and let our wonder play upon it ; this power of the book and the influence of the teacher is worthy of our careful attention. Centuries before, a great thinker, a noble poet, had poured out his soul on this high theme—" the suffering servant of God." These written symbols on the roll of the book, not perfectly preserved, yet in their general outline clear, give to the thoughtful reader a picture of a mysterious figure, a man apparently cursed of God and forsaken by his fellows. The student, poring reverently over the written page, comes into communion with the saints of olden times ; he is constrained to wonder and to worship ; intelligent curiosity is quickened and he longs to enter more fully into the significance of the great vision.

Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, have each, in their turn, held the central place of the world's stage ; their empires have one after the other fallen into decay, but the poet's vision, his tragic song, with its triumphant close, lives on and gains a larger life. To-day it speaks in all the languages of the world and is recognized as a part of that " word of God " which lives and

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abides for evermore. In the increase of mere printed matter, let us not forget the miracle of living literature.

Indeed, these two men, in their meeting and mutual ministry, represent and embody in themselves two great forces on whose vigour and balance depends the health of the Church. The written word—"Understandest thou what thou readest ?" : the living interpreter—"How can I, except some one shall guide me ?" Both these forces have their part to play. The book alone can do much if it is used in simplicity by the eager truth-seeking spirit. We need not fear to scatter the book, for the spirit that inspired it is working in the souls of men. It has suffered much from our hardness and blindness, but it continues to work its own miracles. We have at times worshipped the letter that killeth and missed the life-giving spirit. This may have led to its neglect, but if there is to be a real revival of religion the book must regain its place in the Church and the hearts of the people.

There may be danger in a mechanical worship of the book ; there is much more danger in the careless neglect of it. The book is the thing that distinguishes us from the savage, untutored races ; we have the wisdom of all the ages stored up for us in definite, reliable forms, and in this vast store-house among the most precious things are the words in which saintly men, under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, have expressed their eager search for God and truth. We need also the expositor, the man

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who enters into the spirit of the great literature and applies it to the needs of present life. For this scholarship and study are needed ; only by faithful toil can we attempt to recreate the past. The supreme need, however, is that the interpreter should share the same life, so that, bowing before the eternal God, he can cherish the same eternal hope. Spiritual fellowship and sympathy is the condition for entering into the thoughts and feelings of our ancestors, who fought the good fight under such different conditions, and cleared the pathway for us. To place the Bible into living relationship with the changing conditions of our restless age, it is not enough to have linguistic and historical research and a systematic reconstruction of theology ; we need men who can guide others, because through their own experience there has been given to them a vision of the meaning and purpose of this great revelation.

The evangelist here lifts the old book into the latest light, and that is what we must do to-day. He had seen Jesus, his mind was full of that wonderful life and mysterious death ; the ministry to the sick and poor, the patient endurance of persecution, the triumph over shame and death, these had not then had time to become either traditions or dogmas ; they were viewed as living experiences, and in their light the prophet's picture gained a deeper meaning. To begin from that point and "preach unto him Jesus" was, for the evangelist, a natural, joyous task. It may be a profitable duty for us to compare in

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many cases the original meaning with the evangelical application of Old Testament texts. Thus we gain a twofold vision and measure the course of a great movement. Doing this we shall acquire confidence to affirm that Philip's action can be repeated to-day with the same results ; when all the light from Eastern history and Western science is poured upon the Old Testament, it does not shrink and fade into local littleness ; the divine revelation appears in richer glory, the more we realize that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." Read in the light that streams from the Cross, it was seen that the prophets had pointed to greater things than they themselves had dreamed of ; that it was not the clear, sharp features of their pictures that were the most valuable, but the vague outlines, the unutterable longings, the mystic visions that satisfied their souls by suggestions of the infinite, and also left room for that fulfilment which is not for one age but for all time.

We are at once struck by the intelligence as well as the modesty of this Ethiopian proselyte ; but surely it is what we might expect from a pilgrim who was attracted by one of the greatest and most difficult passages in the Old Testament. He seizes upon the central question as he meditates upon the impressive description of the suffering servant. "Of whom speaketh the prophet this ? Of himself or of some other ?" This question, to which it is so easy to give a superficial, traditional answer, is a question that has taxed the thought of Jew and Gentile through many

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centuries, and it still faces every new student. All Christian expositors now find the real fulfilment of the prophecy in the life and teaching of our Lord, but scarcely any regard it as a strictly specific prediction in such a way as to exclude other noble meanings and suggestions.

It is no advantage to Christianity to deny the services rendered to humanity by the suffering of God's servant Israel. The principle that enables New Testament writers to apply so much of the Old Testament to Jesus as the Christ is not that they separate Him from human kind, but rather that they regard Him as the ideal man in whom the noblest qualities of all the saints are found in their highest perfection. The form of this man's question shows that it comes from a mind that is free and unprejudiced, responding to the stimulus of a great appeal. We can admit that the prophet spoke out of and even of himself, in the sense that such a vision is only given to the man who has what we call to-day "the Christ-spirit." Prophecy was not magic, not a mechanical control, it had its relation to the life of the man to whom it came as well as to the spirit of God. This nameless saint who has left for us this picture possessing undying interest and power prophesied of some great one, and as he did so he revealed the deep things of his own soul. After we have said that he spoke of himself, that he spoke of his own community, its cross and its service, that he spoke of us, of the possibility of discipline and conquest in our lives, there is still something more. When we



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have said all this we have not taken from the position of our Master one atom of its supreme glory and significance. It has pleased God that our Lord Jesus should suffer these bitter experiences and afterwards enter into glory. That glory is surely the glory of service to humanity. He came "not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." The Church may sometimes have forgotten this, and acted as if men were made simply to be the abject slaves of its princes and pastors ; but the possibility of, and inspiration for the larger service has not come merely from our passionate human hunger for freedom of thought and equality of opportunity, but also from the fact that pious souls could turn to the life of Jesus and feel that here was the true revelation of the divine. The Church has been too much concerned with the splendour of its organization and the smooth perfection of its creed, so that many have come to think that there is no real connection between its theology and the life of the lowly prophet of Nazareth. He moved in the open air, fought the tyranny of tradition, despised the trammels of social etiquette, denounced the corruptions of the higher classes and poured out His soul for the poor. Surely no one can deny that the Christian Church has been, in many ways, in spite of its glaring imperfections, the servant of humanity ; but, like all organizations, it is in danger of separating the service of God from the service of men ; in other words, of allowing the means to become

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the end, of prizes creed more than character, and setting ritual above life. Hence, we need constantly to go back to the story of the suffering servant in the vision of the prophet and in the life of the Christ. These great things remain, so that if the Church becomes hard, self-centred, forgetful of the world's sorrow, men may turn from the external Church and come once more into contact with the original sources of her life.

III. THE PERFECT REALIZATION. General discussion concerning the Messianic claims and character of our Lord are not possible here, and not necessary. That which does demand a brief exposition is the right of Philip to preach to this man "Jesus" as the fulfilment of this prophecy. That is to say, we are called upon to recognize that in the life and teaching of our Saviour, as it stands before us in the fourfold record, the Servant idea has received its noblest expression. Along this line three brief suggestions may be made.

The life of Jesus set before us in the Gospels is a perfect union of the service of God and the service of man. In it religion, morality, philanthropy are completely blended. It is all lifted naturally into the atmosphere of prayer and praise by the constant recognition of the Father. Its religious character is neither hidden nor paraded; its inspiration appears quite clearly as coming from communion with God. All its energy is spent in social service, in what we call

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practical philanthropy. He moves through all classes of society in the same spirit ; the supreme thing with Him is not the traditions of the external forms of the Law but the life of men. His heart goes out towards the poor as He sees them lacking leadership, often oppressed by their rulers, easily attracted towards sensations, in which there was no real help. All this can be easily amplified and illustrated, but our main point now is the organic unity of it all; it is not a life split into separate compartments ; the thought and action, the motive and the service are all in harmony ; the goodness and helpfulness are rooted in the fact that the Son of God is also the Son of Man.

He makes this claim for Himself : “ I am among you as he that serveth.” That He should symbolize this in a so-called menial form, by washing the feet of His disciples, might seem absurd to the impulsive Peter ; and certainly it does not call for mechanical repetition, as if the virtue resided in the literal form. But we go back, always with delight, to that noble piece of symbolism which declares that the divine life may be manifested in lowly service. It is clear from many of the greatest sayings in the Gospels that there was for Him no higher thought than this, that He had come forth from God to be the servant of men. If we are to serve Him we must first accept His service. It is those who feel most keenly that He has stooped down to serve them, who rise up most firmly to serve Him by ministry to their

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fellow-men. All round the world to-day the missionaries of the Cross carry this message, and we know that it is one of the greatest powers to free man from low superstitious ideas of the service of God and to inspire a spirit of human brotherhood.

The same spirit is shown in the ideal of Christian life and service set before the disciples.

Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you ; but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister ; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant. (Matt. xx. 25.)

The story of "man's inhumanity to man" is a bitter comment on this description of the world's great ones. Brilliant exceptions there have been in all lands and ages, but on the whole place and power have too often been grasped, to be used selfishly. This clear declaration that not position and privilege but kindness and service are the proofs of true greatness, has not altogether failed of its effect. The Prime Minister in Christian lands is expected to use his ability and spend his strength in efforts for the common good. In striving to hold the balance justly he must often meet with the fierce opposition of foes and the languid support of friends. There are politicians who seek only their own advancement, or who consider only the interests of their own class ; but the true statesman is guided by the Christian ideal of unselfish service.

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Kings to-day are judged not by the splendour of their courts or by the number of their palaces ; mere extravagance of display tends to provoke criticism and quicken sharp reflection on the sad contrasts of life ; they are expected to show their loyalty in service that bears some proportion to the largeness of their opportunity. Not for "great ones" only is the command and example ; it is an ideal and inspiration that must permeate our lowly lives to make them wholesome and sweet. Its rewards are not merely in another world ; they are here in the strength and satisfaction that real service always brings. Because this is our duty and destiny, because the will of God is indeed our peace, do we find in the service itself its own reward. The joy set before the Son of Man was surely not all in any external pomp or glory here or hereafter ; it was the joy of helping men by His vision and service of God.

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